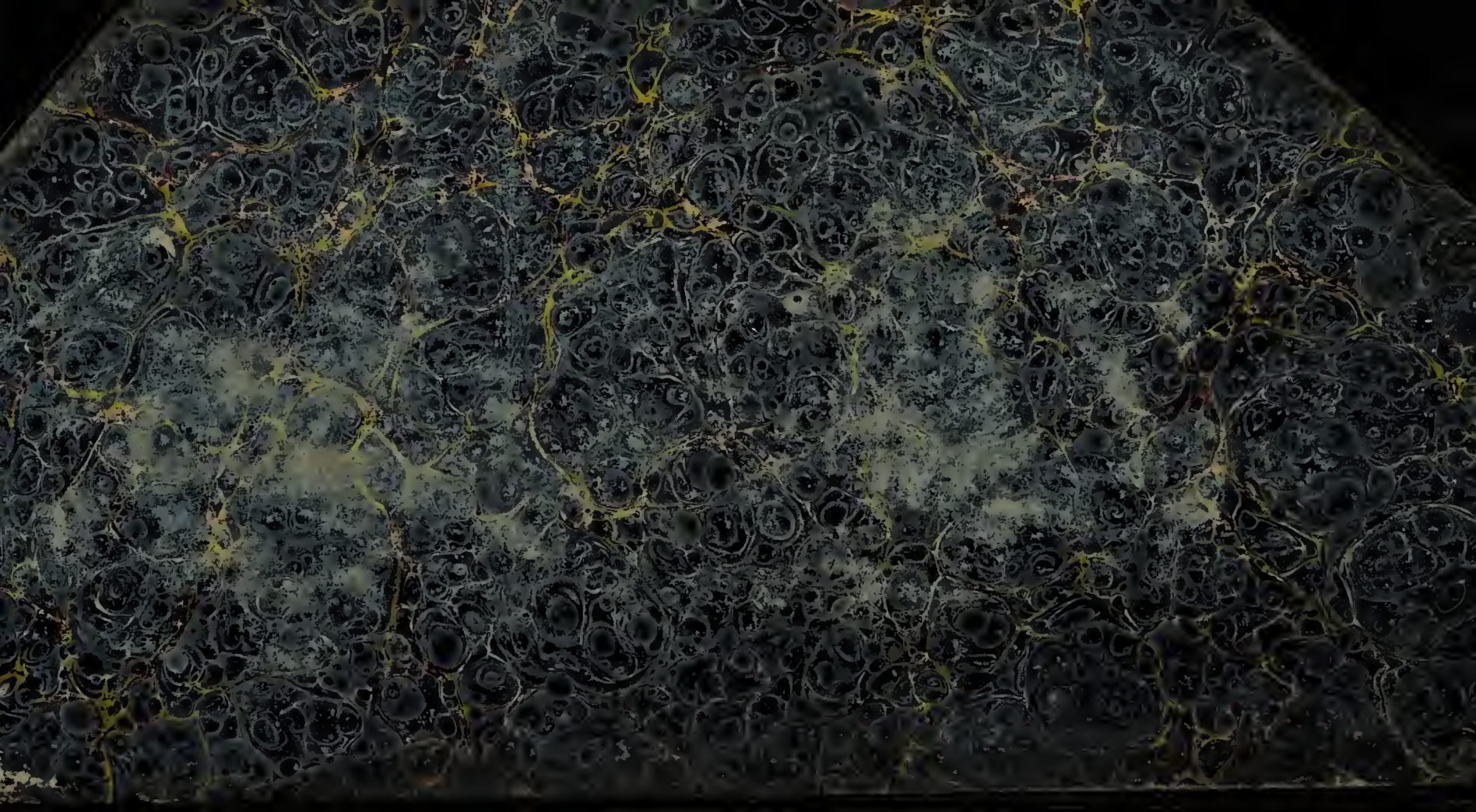

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TWO TRACTS,

INTENDED TO CONVEY CORRECT NOTIONS

OF

REGENERATION & CONVERSION

ACCORDING TO THE

SENSE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE, AND OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

Extracted from the BAMPTON LECTURE of 1812,
and published in a Form adapted for Circulation among the Community at large
at the Request of the Salop District Committee of the Society for
Promoting Christian Knowledge.

BY RICHARD MANT, D.D.

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TRACT I.

JOHN iii. 5.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

AT the time that Almighty God first selected the Jews for his peculiar people, he instituted the rite of circumcision, whereby they were to be admitted into covenant with him. This institution was designed not only for an outward and visible mark to distinguish those who professed their belief in the true God; but at the same time for a memorial to remind them of his covenant; and for a monument to incite them to perform their part of the covenant; and for a token that God would perform his part.

This institution, which was designed for the Jews as the chosen people of God, was extended to those strangers also, who became proselytes to the true faith. But in addition to this, another ceremony was appointed by the Jews themselves, derived, as they imagined, from the law of Moses, and certainly stamped with the sanction of high antiquity. Proud of their own peculiar sanctity, as the elect people of God, and regarding all the rest of mankind as in a state of uncleanness, they would not admit converts into their church without washing, to denote their being cleansed from their natural impurity. Proselytes, thus purified and admitted into the Jewish church by baptism, were said to be regenerated, or

born again: nor was this a mere empty appellation; but being considered dead to their former relations, they became entitled to rights and privileges, from which by nature they were excluded.

The duration of God's covenant with the Jews being limited, the right of circumcision was of course limited, and was to cease upon the completion of God's promise in the sending of Christ. God had now accomplished his covenant with Abraham by sending that seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. And as there was no longer to be any distinction in favour of the Jews, the children of Abraham, above the other nations of the world, the outward mark of distinction was no longer useful. God was now to show no respect unto persons, to the circumcised or to the uncircumcised; but in every nation, among the Gentiles, as well as among the Jews, he that feared God and worked righteousness was equally to be accepted with him.

But upon the introduction of the new covenant in Christ, God was pleased to institute a new ceremony; whereby mankind at large were to be admitted into covenant with him, as the Jews had been by the rite of circumcision. For this purpose Christ adopted baptism, which had been consecrated by his brethren after the flesh to a similar use; and ordained it as the rite, by which those, who believed in him, should be admitted to the privileges of his religion. "He kept the ceremony," says Bishop Taylor, "that they, who were led only by outward things, might be the better called in, and easier enticed into the religion, when they entered by a ceremony, which their nation always used in the like cases; and therefore, without change of the outward act, he put into it a new spirit, and gave it a new grace and a proper efficacy: he sublimed it to higher ends, and adorned it with stars of heaven: he made it to signify greater mysteries, to convey greater bless-

ings, to consign the bigger promises, to cleanse deeper than the skin, and to carry proselytes farther than the gates of the institution. For so he was pleased to do in the other sacrament: he took the ceremony which he found ready in the custom of the Jews, where the major-domo after the paschal supper gave bread and wine to every person of his family; he changed nothing of it without, but transferred the rite to greater mysteries, and put his own Spirit to their sign, and it became a sacrament evangelical [1]."

It was to this sacrament of baptism, the institution of which he was anticipating, that our Saviour alluded, when he declared to the Jewish Rabbi, who was inquiring into the nature of his doctrine, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God:" and when, in reply to a farther inquiry, he repeated his former declaration, and stated it in more limited and specific terms, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It should appear, I say, that he was here alluding by anticipation to the sacrament of baptism, which he intended to ordain; and to that supernatural grace, which was thereby to be conferred through the instrumentality of water, and by the agency of the Holy Ghost: adopting not only the ceremony itself, which he meant to exalt to more noble and spiritual purposes; but also the very term, by which the Jews had described the change wrought in the baptized, although he undoubtedly employed it, in a similar indeed, but in an infinitely more dignified sense. To the proselyte from heathenism to the Jewish faith, baptism had been a death to his natural incapacities, and a new birth to the civil privileges of a Jew: to him, who should be admitted to a profession of the Christian faith, and who

[1] Life of Christ, part i. sect. 9.

should be "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God[1];" it was to be a death unto sin, and a new birth unto those spiritual privileges, which should accompany his deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God[2]." The Jewish proselyte had been baptized with water: the Christian was to be baptized not with water only, but with the Holy Ghost. "Baptism," says the same pious and learned Prelate, to whom I just referred, asserting at the same time the doctrine, and explaining the ground of it; "Baptism is a new birth, by which we enter into the new world, the new creation, the blessings and spiritualities of the kingdom. And this is the expression, which our Saviour himself used to Nicodemus, Unless a man be born of water and the Spirit. And it is by St. Paul called the laver of regeneration. For now we begin to be reckoned in a new census or account; God is become our father, Christ our elder brother, the Spirit the earnest of our inheritance, the Church our mother; our food is the body and blood of our Lord; faith is our learning; religion our employment; and our whole life is spiritual, and heaven the object of our hopes, and the mighty price of our high calling. And from this time forward we have a new principle put into us, the Spirit of grace, which, besides our soul and body, is a principle of action, of one nature, and shall with them enter into the portion of our inheritance. And because from henceforward we are a new creation, the Church uses to assign new relations to the catechumens, spiritual fathers and susceptors[3]."

I make no scruple of considering the words of our Saviour in the text, as indicating the sacrament of baptism; because I believe it to be the doctrine of the

[1] John i. 13. [2] Rom. viii. 21.

[3] Life of Christ, part i. sect. 9.

Bible, and I am sure it is the doctrine of the Church of England, agreeably to which I conceive it to be the opinion of the generality of the national Clergy, that by that sacrament we are made Christians, and are born anew of water and of the Holy Spirit: or that I may express myself in the words of the late apostolical Bishop Wilson, that "regeneration or new birth is that spiritual change, which is wrought by the Holy Spirit upon any person in the use of baptism; whereby he is translated out of his natural state, as a descendant of Adam, to a spiritual state in Christ; that is, to a state of salvation; in which, if it is not his own fault, he will be saved [1]." This doctrine, however, has been virtually at least, if not actually denied; and denied in terms, which charge the maintainers of it with blindness and ignorance; with innovating on evangelical truth; with being opposers of the doctrines of the Gospel, and patrons of a heathenish superstition [2].

As it may be important to prove, beyond the possibility of a suspicion to the contrary, that the accusation which is to be made the subject of our present inquiry implicates the Church of England as well as the generality of her ministers, I shall venture to show by the adduction of several passages in her Liturgy, which it might be otherwise superfluous to specify, that the doctrine of Regeneration by baptism is most clearly asserted by her: or, in other words, that "she supposes, in strict conformity with the Scriptures," not merely "that all real Christians are regenerate by God's Holy Spirit [3]," by which I understand all those who live a Christian life; but that those also are so regenerated who receive baptism rightly, or, what in the case of infants, at least in a Christian country, amounts to the same thing, to whom baptism is rightly administered, notwithstanding

[1] Works, vol. iv. p. 411, 8vo.
[2] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, quoted below, p. 23.
[3] See Overton's True Churchman, &c. p. 199.

by their future conduct they may forfeit the privileges of their new birth.

The office with which I begin is the ministration of public baptism to infants, which the priest, having ascertained that the child has not been baptized, is directed to commence in this form: "Dearly beloved; forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin, and that our Saviour Christ saith, none can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost: I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant unto this child that thing, which by nature he cannot have, that he may be baptized with water and the Holy Ghost, and be received into Christ's holy Church, and be made a lively member of the same." I give the address at length, because it is placed at the very opening of the ministration of baptism, and is designed to draw the attention of the hearers to the purpose, for which baptism is administered. It consists of two parts; an admonition to the people to pray, and a reason for the admonition: what they are to pray for partly is, that "the child may be baptized with water and the Holy Ghost;" the reason for their being called on so to pray, is, "forasmuch as Christ saith, none can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost." Putting these passages together, what else is the prayer that the child may be baptized with water and the Holy Ghost, than a prayer that by baptism he may be born anew?

Proceeding to the prayers, I do not rest on that general expression in the first, where we pray God "to wash and sanctify the child with the Holy Ghost;" but going forward to the second, I beg your attention to that passage, wherein the priest is directed to say, "Almighty God, we call upon thee for this infant; that he, coming to thy holy baptism,

may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration." The passage needs no comment: it will only be recollected that the question is, what does the Church of England understand by our Saviour's expression of being born of water and of the Spirit? Nor is it necessary to make any other comment on the following extracts, while I point to that prayer, where we entreat Almighty God to "give his Holy Spirit to the infant about to be baptized, that he may be born again:" to the prayer of consecration, where we entreat him to "sanctify the water to the mystical washing away of sin, and to grant that the child, now to be baptized therein, may receive the fulness of his grace, and ever remain in the number of his faithful and elect children:" to the address immediately following the baptismal rite, wherein the priest calls on the congregation to give thanks to Almighty God, expressly for this cause, "seeing that the child is regenerate;" and to the thanksgiving that follows, wherein we are instructed to "yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate the infant with thy Holy Spirit, and to receive him for thine own child by adoption." These words must be left to speak for themselves. They admit of no illustration or explanation. Language cannot be plainer.

Let us proceed to the ministration of private baptism of children, where it may be first remarked, that the prayers being the same as in the public baptism, the same expressions of course occur, as those already noticed. But when the child, that has been privately baptized, is admitted into the public congregation, the doctrine is repeated under several new forms of expression. The child, being born in original sin, is said to "be now by the laver of regeneration in baptism received into the number of the children of God:" a prayer is offered to Almighty God, to "give his Holy Spirit to the infant," not, as in the former office, that ye may he born again, but that he "being

born again may continue God's servant:" the congregation is required to give thanks to Almighty God, for that the child "is by baptism regenerate:" and in the same form of prayer as before, thanks are yielded to our most merciful Father, for "having pleased to regenerate the infant with his Holy Spirit, and to receive him for his own child by adoption." This great variety of expression, wherein the same doctrine is so repeatedly conveyed, proves to my mind most satisfactorily, how tenacious the Church of England is of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, and how anxious she is to impress it upon her members.

This variety we trace still further exemplified in the ministration of baptism to such as are of riper years; where, although the service is for the most part the same as that for the baptism of infants, certain particulars are added, not immaterial to be specified in this inquiry. Thus instead of the Gospel from the 10th chapter of St. Mark, which is adapted to the condition of infants, but would be out of place in the baptism of adults, the passage selected is the conversation wherein Christ asserts to Nicodemus the necessity of the new birth; and which is made the foundation of the following exhortation: "Beloved, ye hear in this Gospel the express words of our Saviour Christ, that except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Whereby ye may perceive the great necessity of this sacrament, where it may be had." It must be enough barely to quote this passage: it would be an insult upon any man's understanding to attempt to make it clearer; and it would be superfluous to add more from the same office. If a bare statement of this fact does not convince a man, nothing, I am persuaded, can convince him, that it is by baptism, in the judgment of the Church of England, that a man is born of water and of the Spirit.

I am afraid of fatiguing and wearing out your

patience by multiplying evidences of what must already be so clear. Knowing, however, as I do, and as every one at all acquainted with the state of religion in this country must know, that there are persons, who, not content with denying the doctrine of baptismal regeneration themselves, would fain fasten their own private opinion upon the Church, and sedulously labour to propagate it as hers: I must solicit your attention whilst I proceed to show, by a still greater accumulation of proof, what her doctrine is; and that she does not confine her assertion of it to her baptismal offices, but disseminates it over other parts of her Liturgy.

After being baptized, the first religious duty in which the Church requires a child to be engaged is the learning of the Catechism; and here, reminding him of the privileges to which he was then admitted, the very first thing that she teaches him is, that "in his baptism he was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." In his baptism he was made a child of God! Made a child of God; not formed so at his natural birth, but made so by a second, a new, a spiritual birth; made so at his baptism. As he proceeds, however, the doctrine is more fully and explicitly revealed to him. He is then instructed, that a sacrament is "an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace given unto us;" and that it "is ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same" grace, "and as a pledge to assure us thereof." He is instructed that baptism is a sacrament; and as such, of course consisting of an outward and visible sign, and of an inward and spiritual grace: he is instructed, that the outward sign is "water, wherein the person is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" and being interrogated, what is its inward and spiritual grace, he is instructed to answer "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; for being by nature born

in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace;" hereby, that is, by baptism; neither the argument nor the structure of the sentence can admit of any other interpretation. What can be plainer? Had it been the intention of the composers of the Catechism, as indeed I doubt not it was, to assert most unequivocally the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, how could it have been more directly asserted? Plainer language cannot be found? "The outward sign of baptism is water; the spiritual grace is a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; for we are hereby made the children of grace."

The next religious office, in which the child is engaged, is the order of confirmation; wherein he ratifies and confirms the vows made for him by his sureties at baptism. We have here, then, of course, an allusion to that holy institution; and, as if it were cautiously provided, that the sacramental character of the institution should be kept steadily in view, we are reminded of the regeneration conveyed by it to the baptized. The bishop who presides at the office is thus directed to pray: "Almighty and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins; strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter." The assertion is plain and direct: the Church affirms by the mouth of one of her governors, and she affirms it in the most solemn form of a prayer to the Almighty and everliving God, that he has vouchsafed to regenerate his servants, who come now to be confirmed, by water and the Holy Ghost; not, as hath been confidently alleged, "with a view to blessings contingent upon their future endeavours[1]," but with a view to those, which at baptism they actually receive.

Hitherto we have seen frequent notice taken by the Church of the doctrine of regeneration; and it

[1] See Overton, p. 104.

is remarkable that the parts of the Common Prayer Book, which we have been hitherto examining, have either an immediate connection with, or an obvious relation to, baptism. And I think it no less remarkable, that there is (if I am not strangely mistaken) only one more place in the whole Book of Common Prayer, wherein the doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth, is noticed; and there it is noticed in perfect conformity with her expressions, that have been already cited, as an event already passed, and one in which her members in general have partaken. In her collect for Christmas-day, the Church is led, from a mention of the birth of Christ, to mention the spiritual birth of those who are regenerated in him; who are made partakers of his nature, as he had condescended to become partaker of theirs. The collect runs in this form:—"Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit." The petition is exclusively for daily renovation: the notice of our regeneration, and of our adoption as the children of God, is retrospective; and is the grateful acknowledgment of a blessing, once conferred, and not to be repeated.

From the Liturgy if we direct our attention to the Articles of our Church, we shall find a perfect harmony maintained about the doctrine in question. In three of the Articles it is incidentally alluded to in such a manner, as to show that the Church takes for granted the connection between baptism and the new birth. In the 9th it is laid down, that "the original infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated;" and by the context it appears, that by the regenerate are intended "they that believe and are baptized:" in the 15th, Christians universally are designated by the appellation of those

"who are baptized and born again in Christ;" and the 16th Article speaks of the condition of "those, who fall into sin after baptism;" that is, according to an equivalent expression, after they have "received the Holy Ghost." But that, which is more pointedly and more fully to our purpose, is the 27th Article, which expressly sets forth the doctrine of the Church concerning baptism:—"Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and a mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that are not christened: but it is also a sign of regeneration, or new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the Church: the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; faith is confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God." I give the whole of the description: the part of it, essential to our present inquiry, exactly corresponding with the description in the Catechism, which speaks of the outward visible sign and the inward spiritual grace, is, that baptism, or the washing with water, is a sign of regeneration, or new birth; and that by it, as by an instrument, the promise of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, is visibly signed and sealed.

Such is the doctrine of our Church with regard to regeneration: nor does she consider it as a matter of mere abstract speculation; for in conformity with this she requires her ministers to instruct the people, that "the baptism of their children ought not to be deferred longer than till the first or second Sunday after their birth [1];" "lest" (as one of her most highly esteemed bishops hath observed) "importune and unnecessary delay occasion that the child die before it is dedicated to the service of God, and the religion of the Lord Jesus; before it be born again, admitted

[1] Rubrick before the Office of Private Baptism.

to the promise of the Gospel, and reckoned in the account of the second Adam [1]." And she accordingly pronounces, what gives to the doctrine, that I am maintaining, its great practical importance, that "it is certain by God's word, that children, which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." As to those, who do not die in infancy, she teaches, that the privilege of salvation, thus bestowed by God, through the regeneration of baptism, is continued to them, if they grow up in faith and obedience: if not, it is taken from them, until they repent; for, as it is affirmed in the 16th Article, "the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin; and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives."

I have thus stated the several passages in the Liturgy and Articles, wherein our Church notices regeneration, or the being born again. I have not knowingly omitted one. And I will now venture to express my opinion, that a doubt can hardly exist upon the mind of any reasonable inquirer, with respect to the opinion entertained by our Church on the question of baptismal regeneration. Indeed, so unequivocal was her opinion upon this point understood to be, that when, after the restoration of the royal family and the regal government in Charles the Second, it was enacted, that those ministers, who had gained possession of any benefices during the rebellion, should relinquish their preferment, unless they conformed to the principles and doctrines of the Church of England, the nonconformist ministers, who quitted their stations, assigned this reason, in common with others, for their nonconformity; that "the Church clearly teaches the doctrine of real

[1] Bishop Taylor's Advice to his Clergy. Enchir. Theol. vol. ii. p. 280.

baptismal regeneration[1]." It is therefore with some degree of pain and surprise, that I see any doubt of the inward and spiritual grace of baptism expressed by a living minister of our establishment, whose moderation and Christian charity appear not to be surpassed by his piety and zeal[2]; and I esteem it no gratuitous concession, which is made by the less gentle advocate of a party in the Church, that "she speaks of every child that she has baptized, as regenerate, as a partaker of the privileges of the Gospel, and as in some sense called to a state of salvation." But it is an uncharitable and a cruel insinuation, if he means to charge those whom he calls his opponents with concluding hence, "that our Church knows of no distinction but that between professed Christians and professed Heathens, Jews, &c. and that she really considers *all*, who are her nominal members, in such a sense in a state of salvation, as that they will escape future punishment, and obtain everlasting happiness, *whatever be their characters*." God forbid that we should be justly exposed to so formidable an accusation! Let us rather trust, that whilst, with the Church, we maintain the regenerating efficacy of baptism to those who die before they commit actual sin, with her also we consider, in the language of the same author, that "none who have arrived at maturity, and are capable subjects, are in such a sense Christians, as that they will obtain happiness and heaven, except those who are influenced by Christian principles, and exhibit a Christian conduct; who are penitents, believers, and habitual observers of God's laws[3]."

I have dwelt longer upon this point, and have multiplied proofs to a greater extent than may

[1] Nonconformist's Memorial, Introd. p. 39. See Baxter's Life, p. 313, 327, 342.

[2] See Zeal without Innovation, p. 109.

[3] See Overton's True Churchman, p. 102, 106.

appear necessary to those who are contented to take the plain declarations of our Church in their plain and obvious meaning. To such persons it may be matter of no small astonishment, that one of the founders of Methodism [1], who uniformly gloried in his fidelity to the doctrines of the Church of England, declared that "baptismal regeneration might, with all our best endeavours, be ineffectual;" affirming of himself, that "though he had used all the means for twenty years, yet he was not a Christian;" and adopting the authoritative language of our Saviour, "Verily, verily, I must be born again." To such persons it must be matter of astonishment, that the other great leader of the schism, himself also a minister of the national Church, declared, that "he would as soon believe the doctrine of transubstantiation, as that all people, who are baptized, are born again [2];" and pronounced, that "baptismal regeneration was the Diana of the present clergy and of the present age [3]:" a groundless (I suppose) and a wicked superstition, for which, like the idolaters of Ephesus, or the advocates of unassisted, unenlightened reason, (for their conceits he also denominates, "that great and boasted Diana,") we renounce the articles of Christian faith, which at our baptism we promised to believe. Of persons such as these, regeneration is, as it were, inscribed on the banners, and is one of the watchwords of their sect: regeneration, not the fruit of Christ's holy ordinance of baptism, but the effect of their declamation; not the blessing of a soul, peacefully devoted to Christ's service, but the mark of one zealous in the cause of their party. They who can be persuaded to embrace the tenets of that party, are described as labouring in the pangs and travails of the new birth, until

[1] J. Wesley.
[2] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 351.
[3] Whitefield's Works, vol. iv. p. 162, 241. vol. v. p. 205.

Christ be formed in them; whilst all who tread in the sound paths of the Church, of Scripture, and of antiquity, unseduced by their invitations, and unterrified by their threats, are represented, together with their ministers, those blind leaders of the blind, as unregenerate, unconverted sinners.

I will not retort upon our accusers the charges which they lavish upon us. I will not even insist more strongly upon the discrepancy, which prevails between their tenets and those which the foregoing quotations will have satisfactorily shown to be the tenets of our Church. I will in this place do no more than express my hope and belief, that the remarks which are now about to be offered, and which shall be derived principally from holy Scripture, will at least acquit us of the temerity of blindly subscribing to a doctrine without an appearance of sufficient evidence; even should they fail of proving, that the doctrine itself, unlike the image of the Ephesian Diana, did really "come down from heaven."

Now it is certain, that by being born again, of which our Saviour speaks in such lofty language, something is designed necessary to be attained by those who would enter into the kingdom of God. It is matter, therefore, not of mere idle speculation, but of the nearest and dearest interest, that we examine what is meant by being born again: in order that we may "be filled with all joy and peace in believing" that we partake of it, if, as we apprehend, it is conferred by the sacrament of baptism; or, if not, that we may be enabled to discover, what it is that is thus necessary for our salvation; and where, and when, and how it is to be obtained.

In the first place then, we derive a strong probability in behalf of our supposition from this consideration; that if the work of regeneration is not effected by baptism, it is almost impossible for any sober man to say when and by what means it is: and

that we are thus left without any other guide, than the very questionable criterion of our own imaginations, or our own feelings, to determine, whether we are in possession of that, which our Saviour has pronounced to be an indispensable requisite of salvation. A situation this of doubt, suspense, and anxiety, with regard to our eternal welfare, to which it is reasonable to believe that, with such a revelation of his will as Christianity professes to be, "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" would not expose his humble creatures.

For, that I may prosecute a former observation, if spiritual regeneration be not conferred by baptism, when, (we may reasonably demand) and by what means is it conferred? In what other ceremony, and at what other season, shall we find that joint operation of water and of the Holy Spirit, of which Christ affirms we must be born? I say that joint operation; for surely those, which Christ himself hath joined together, it is not for man to put asunder.

I am the more disposed to press this argument, and to bring it forward in the most prominent point of view, not only because it appears to me decisive on the question; but also, because the importance of the argument seems to be recognised by the silence of our opponents, who in their zeal to enforce regeneration, the being born again, the being born of God, the being born of the Spirit, studiously keep out of sight the instrument whereby Christ says we must be born again. But "that we may be thus born of the Spirit," (I use the words of Bishop Beveridge,) "we must be born also of water, which our Saviour here puts in the first place. Not as if there was any such virtue in water, whereby it could regenerate us; but because this is the rite or ordinance appointed by Christ, wherein he regenerates us by his Holy Spirit: our regeneration is wholly the act of the Spirit of Christ. But there must be something done

on our parts in order to it; and something that is instituted and ordained by Christ himself, which in the Old Testament was circumcision, in the New, baptism or washing with water; the easiest that could be invented, and the most proper to signify his cleansing and regenerating us by his Holy Spirit. And seeing this is instituted by Christ himself, as we cannot be born of water without the Spirit, so neither can we in an ordinary way be born of the Spirit without water, used or applied in obedience and conformity to his institution. Christ hath joined them together, and it is not in our power to part them; he that would be born of the Spirit, must be born of water also [1]."

Upon this point the observation of one of our first and most celebrated reformers is not unworthy of attention. "Like as Christ was born in rags," says the venerable Latimer, "so the conversion of the whole world is by rags, by things which are most vile in this world. For what is so common as water? every foul ditch is full of it: yet we wash out remission of our sins by baptism; for like as he was found in rags, so we must find him by baptism. There we begin: we are washed with water, and then the words are added; for we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, whereby the baptism receiveth its strength. Now this sacrament of baptism is a thing of great weight; for it ascertaineth and assureth us, that like as the water washeth the body, and cleanseth it, so the blood of Christ our Saviour cleanseth and washeth it from all filth and uncleanness of sins [2]." And so it is taught in King Edward's Catechism, that "baptism doth represent and set before our eyes that we are by the Spirit of Christ new born,

[1] Beveridge's Sermons, vol. i. p. 304.
[2] Bp. Latimer's Sermon, vol. ii. p. 779.

and cleansed from sin; that we be members and parts of his Church, received into the communion of saints. For water signifieth the Spirit[1]."

For the purpose, therefore, of regeneration, we conceive this union of water, as the instrument, with the Spirit, as the efficient principle, to be necessary, where it may be had; and although we acknowledge with humble and grateful hearts, that the continued and unceasing influence of the Spirit is requisite for the welfare of our souls, and that we are daily renewed by his sanctifying power, sometimes perhaps without the instrumentality of outward means; still we are justified in contending, that for the express purpose of regeneration, not only is his operation necessary, but that it must also (humbly speaking) be administered through the mediation of water. It is not for man to dispense with the ordinances of God.

Nay, for man to take upon him to dispense with God's ordinances, is not only generally an act of presumption, but it is also in a particular manner to derogate from the honour due to that Holy Spirit, by whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption. "For a special prerogative" (saith Bishop Andrewes) "hath the Holy Ghost in our baptism above the other two persons of the Trinity. That laver is his laver properly, where we are not only to be baptized into him, as into the other two; but also even to be baptized with him, which is proper to him alone. For besides the water, we are there to be born anew of the Holy Ghost also, else there is no entering for us into the kingdom of God[2]." So that to deny the regenerating effect of baptism is in some sense to do despite unto the Spirit of grace, and to rob him of his peculiar honour.

And farther; not only is it presumptuous to attempt to separate water from the Spirit, but it is at the same time altogether unnecessary. If indeed it

[1] Enchir. Theol. vol. i. p. 52. [2] Serm. V. on the Holy Ghost, p. 641.

could be made appear that they never acted together, we must be content, (how much soever it might seem at variance with the express affirmation of our Saviour,) still we must be content to admit the notion of their distinct and independent operation. But when baptism presents itself to our minds, as a rite instituted by Christ for the admission of disciples into his Church, and when it may be satisfactorily argued from the highest authority, that baptism is the vehicle of regeneration; why should we look for any other? Why should we resort to a forced, an unnatural and a presumptuous construction, to supply us from a distance with the uncertain shadow of a blessing, when the plainest and most easy interpretation of our Saviour's words places the substance immediately in our hands?

That this blessing is conferred upon us by baptism, I assert on the authority of Scripture.

It is the doctrine of the holy Scriptures, that we are by baptism made heirs of salvation through Christ; and it is the declaration of our Saviour, that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, which is equivalent to the expression, that we cannot become heirs of salvation, except we be born anew of water and of the Spirit. If then we cannot become heirs of salvation, except we be born of water and of the Spirit, and if we be made heirs of salvation by baptism, I see not how we are to evade the consequence, that the outward washing of baptism is attended by the sanctification of the Spirit, and that we are born of water and of the Spirit, when we are baptized. Thus when our Saviour, on giving his commission to the Apostles to go, teach all nations, baptizing them, accompanied it with the promise, that he that believed and was baptized should be saved, it must clearly be understood, that the communication of the Holy Spirit and spiritual regeneration were to attend on baptism, which is here expressly represented as the means of salvation.

A single text of Scripture, properly understood, may serve for the foundation of a doctrine. "Where there are a multitude of affirmations in Scripture," said the learned reformer Bishop Ridley, "and where there is but one affirmation, all is one concerning the truth of the matter: for that which any one of the Evangelists spake, inspired by the Holy Ghost, was as true as that which was spoken of all [1]." But as the evidence will undoubtedly strike with accumulated force, if a doctrine shall appear not to rest on an insulated passage, but to be expressed or implied under a variety of forms, and to diffuse its leaven, as it were, through a large mass of the sacred volume, I shall proceed to state several scriptural authorities, on which the notion of our being regenerated by baptism may be incontrovertibly maintained.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to Titus, having remarked upon the depraved state of men before their conversion to Christianity, thus proceeds: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour: that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life [2]:" by the washing of regeneration, "by the laver of regeneration," as it is rendered in our baptismal office; by "the fountain of the new birth [3]," as one of our Homilies expresses it. By comparing together the several parts of this passage, it is evident that baptism is here represented as the mean through which, or the instrument by which the Holy Spirit of God regenerates us; and thereby makes us heirs

[1] Ridley's Life of Bishop Ridley, p. 437. [2] Tit. iii. 4—7.
[3] Homily on the Nativity, p. 345.

of that eternal life, which the mercy of God our Saviour hath provided for those whom he justifies and saves.

The same apostle, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, again representing as before the wretchedness of unbelievers, immediately adds, with reference to the Christian converts, whom he was addressing, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God [1]." Where, as the Lord Jesus is mentioned as the meritorious cause of sanctification and justification, and the Spirit of our God as the efficient and operating cause; so also is the washing of baptism mentioned as the instrument by which those blessings are conveyed: for "then it is," saith Bishop Taylor, "that God pours forth, together with the sacramental waters, a salutary and holy fountain of grace, to wash the soul from all its stains and impure adherences [2]." It is true, that in this passage there occurs no such expression as regeneration, or the being born again; but, as it was before argued, if a person must be born again in order to be saved or justified, and if by baptism he is saved or justified, it then necessarily follows that by baptism he is born again.

The argument is more direct from what the same apostle says to the Colossians: "Buried with Christ in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him [3]." What can be plainer or stronger to the point? Dead in their sins, and buried in baptism, by baptism also they were raised and quickened by God.

To the Romans he employs the same figure, de-

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

[2] Taylor's Life of Christ, p. 199.

[3] 1 Col. ii. 12, 13.

scribing baptism as a burial, wherein they were dead unto sin and alive unto God: adding withal a particular, which confirms an opinion presently to be insisted on, that no other than baptismal regeneration is to be expected in this world. For having observed, "that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him: for in that he died, he died unto sin once, but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God[1];" the Apostle immediately subjoins, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves," likewise, in a like or in the same manner, "to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Does not the language of the Apostle warrant the argument, that we are born anew in baptism; and in baptism exclusively?

In the epistle to the Ephesians, again, he takes for the ground of an exhortation to conjugal affection, that "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish[2]." Sanctification and purity, unspotted and unblemished holiness, are here attributed to the Church of Christ, as the effect of the washing of water. But what water could produce such an effect without the operation of the Spirit? And what rite is performed by their joint operation, but the sacrament of baptism? And by what appropriate scriptural term is the effect of their united influence to be denominated, but by that of regeneration?

Similar questions arise from the affirmation of the same Apostle to the Corinthians: "By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body[3]." Allow the baptism here spoken of to be used in a literal sense,

[1] Rom. vi. 4. 11. [2] Eph. v. 25, 26, 27.
[3] 1 Cor. xii. 13.

and its spiritual, and in course its regenerating, influence follows. Maintain that the use of the term is figurative, as the Quaker does in this and other passages of the New Testament, and with him you may renounce the sacrament of baptism; which perhaps it were more consistent to do altogether, than to retain the ceremony, and to divest it, as far as can depend upon the denial, of that which gives it its value.

The same inference is to be drawn from St. Peter's first exhortation to the Jews after our Saviour's ascension; "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost[1]." The same inference follows from his language on his first preaching to the Gentiles: when, although the Holy Ghost immediately fell on them, so that they spake with tongues, and some might probably have thought it unnecessary to baptize such as had already received the Holy Ghost, yet (says Bishop Beveridge) "the Apostle, considering that this gift of the Holy Ghost was only to enable them to speak with tongues, not to regenerate them, inferred from thence that they ought the rather to be baptized: Can any man, said he, forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he therefore commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord; which he would never have done, if it had not been necessary for them to be born of water and of the Spirit[2]." And such is the inference from Ananias's admonition to Paul, after his miraculous conversion: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord[3]."

It may be here not unimportant to remark, that as we argue for baptism being the vehicle of regenera-

[1] Acts ii. 38. [2] Bishop Beveridge's Works, vol. i. p. 305. [3] Acts ii. 38.

tion, because it is the vehicle of salvation to which regeneration is necessary; so also we may come to the same conclusion from this consideration; that all Christians, all persons who have been baptized, are indiscriminately said to have been regenerated. In the passages already cited from several epistles of St. Paul, it will have appeared, that he applies the term to large societies of believers; especially to the churches at Rome and at Colosse. The language, which he addresses to Titus upon that subject, appears to be at least equally comprehensive; whilst St. Peter and St. John, each in a catholic epistle, addressed to immense societies of Christians scattered throughout the east, describe the persons whom they address as "sons of God[1]," "begotten and born again[2]." But wherefore, unless their regeneration was the effect of an ordinance, of which all Christians in general partake? And if so, of what ordinance but of baptism?

From these several authorities I apprehend it to be established, as the general doctrine of the Gospel, that the new birth or regeneration, which is pronounced by our Saviour to be necessary to salvation, or (as he expresses it) to seeing or entering into the kingdom of God, is effected by the operation of the Holy Ghost at baptism. To this purpose beautiful and satisfactory is the illustration of the learned Joseph Mede, where, speaking of St. Paul's text to Titus, as making baptism and regeneration type and countertype, he adds, "The same was represented by that vision at our Saviour's baptism, of the Holy Ghost descending upon him as he came out of the water, in the similitude of a dove: for I suppose," he continues, "that in that baptism of his the mystery of all our baptisms was visibly acted; and that God says to every one truly baptized, as he said to him, in a proportionable sense, Thou art my son, in whom I

[1] 1 John iii. 2. [2] 1 Pet. i 3. 2

am well pleased [1]." Indeed, to deny the regenerating influence of baptism is to deny its sacramental character; to strip it of that which makes it most valuable; and to reduce it to a mere "beggarly element, a form without substance, a body without spirit, a sign without signification; it is as one sound Divine describes it, "to make it no better than a piece of solemn pageantry [2];" or (to adopt the comparison of the same learned writer to whom I lately referred) it is "to make of it an empty shell, whose kernel is taken out; or a carcase whose soul is gone [3]." Of the folly of this conduct, and of the source from which it proceeds, one of our excellent Reformers strongly expressed his opinion, when he said, that "in all ages the devil had stirred up some light heads to esteem the sacraments but lightly, as to be empty and bare signs [4]:" and of the tendency of this conduct we have a memorable proof in the Calvinistic founder of Methodism, who deprecated "disputing about baptism, and other non-essentials, as the effect of a narrow spirit, a party sectarian zeal [5]." Strip the sacrament of its spiritual character, and we see to what it is avowedly reduced.

I am well aware, that no authority is admissible for the foundation of a doctrine, except that of the inspired writings. It is however sometimes of advantage to know, and it affords a strong collateral support to a doctrine if we can learn, how controverted expressions have been understood by those, who were most likely to be acquainted with their proper signification. The testimony of the ancient Fathers was esteemed one of the best criterions of the sense of the holy Scriptures concerning the sacraments, by "a worthy martyr of God, the glory of the English

1 Mede's Works, Disc. xvii.
2 Examination of Tilenus, p. 267.
3 Mede's Works, Book i. Disc. xliii.
4 Latimer. See Ridley's Life of Bishop Ridley, p. 459.
5 Whitefield's Works, vol. i. p. 394.

Reformation," who endured the flames in support of the true evangelical doctrine of the Lord's supper, and whose opinion of the other sacrament, coinciding with that of his brother in faith and martyrdom, already laid before you, is contained in his own declaration, that " as the body is nourished by the bread and wine at the communion, and the soul by grace and spirit with the body of Christ; even so in baptism the body is washed with the visible water, and the soul is cleansed from all filth by the invisible Holy Ghost [1]."

It may therefore be useful to remark, and it will be a curious remark to those who bear in mind the assertion of one of our accusers about " baptismal regeneration being the Diana of the present age;" that the opinions of the early Christians uniformly support the doctrine, which I have been deducing from the authority of Scripture. " What Christ means by being born of water and of the Spirit," observed Bishop Beveridge about 150 years ago, is now made a question; I say now; for it was never made so till of late years. For many ages together none ever doubted it, but the whole Christian world took it for granted, that our Saviour by these words meant only, that except a man be baptized according to his institution, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God: this being the most plain and obvious sense of the words, forasmuch as there is no other way of being born again of water as well as of the Spirit, but only in the sacrament of baptism [2]."

Baptism indeed, and regeneration, the terms which specifically denote the outward sign and the spiritual grace, appear to have been employed by the early Christians, as expressions of the same import. " Whoever," says Justin Martyr, " are persuaded and believe that the things taught and said by us are true, and undertake to live agreeably to them, are

[1] Ridley's Life of Bp. Ridley, p. 684, 669, 620.
[2] Beveridge's Works, vol. i. p. 304.

led by us to a place where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner, in which we were regenerated: for they are washed in the name of God the Father and Lord of all, of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. For Christ said, If ye are not regenerated, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." And it is the doctrine of Austin, whose opinion will doubtless weigh with those, who represent his doctrines as the model of their own, that "they, who partake of the sacrament of baptism, die unto sin, as Christ also died unto sin, that is, unto the flesh, the image of sin; and live, by being born again of the laver, as he by rising from the grave." And this doctrine he maintains without any limitation, or rather excepting against every limitation, in point of age. "For," (he subjoins) "from the infant newly born, even to the decrepit old man, as no one is to be prohibited from baptism, so there is no one who does not die unto sin in baptism; but infants die only to original sin, adults to all their sins, whatsoever they have added by their evil lives to that which they contracted at their births." But not to multiply quotations to this effect from the writers of antiquity, I observe in the words of a learned and sound Divine of the last century, that, "it has been well proved at large, beyond all reasonable contradiction, that both the Greek and Latin Fathers not only used the word regeneration for baptism, but so appropriated it also to baptism, as to exclude any other conversion or repentance, not considered with baptism, from being signified by that name; so that according to the ancients, regeneration or new birth was either baptism itself (including both sign and thing); or a change of man's spiritual state, considered as wrought by the Spirit in and through baptism [1]."

[1] Waterland on Regeneration. See Churchman's Remembrancer, No. I. p. 9.

The doctrine being thus generally established, it rests with those who contend for any other regeneration, to show either the exception to its taking place at baptism; or that having then taken place, it may afterwards be repeated. We have, as I believe, and, as I trust hath been sufficiently demonstrated, scriptural authority for asserting, that baptism is the vehicle of the new birth; so that although I dare not make, I could not controvert the assertion, if made in the language of Bishop Hopkins, without the limitations with which he qualifies the proposition, "that baptismal regeneration must be acknowledged by all, that will not wilfully shut their eyes against the clear evidence of Scripture[1]." And if ever the new-birth be not conveyed by baptism, rightly received; or if, when once regenerated, it be (I will not say necessary, but) possible for any one to be born again, doubtless there is scriptural authority to that purpose. Let the authority then be adduced. Let it be shown from Holy Writ, that any person, by whom baptism was rightly received, was not regenerated; let it be shown that any person having been once baptized, is described under any circumstances whatever of repentance, reformation, renovation, or conversion, to have been again regenerated: let it be shown, that the Apostles, who are perpetally exhorting their Christian converts to changes such as these, do once exhort them to become regenerate; do once enforce the necessity of it; or even affirm, or at least insinuate, its possibility; and we may then perceive some reason for wavering in our belief. It will then be ample time to condemn us for error, when we can be convicted from the oracles of truth: meanwhile, standing, as we trust we do, on the unshaken rock of the Gospel, let us not be accused of an heathenish superstition, until the Gospel can be brought to confute us.

[1] Works, vol. ii. p. 423. 8vo. ed.

The error of our accusers appears to have arisen from disregarding the outward form of regeneration; from an inattention to the union intended by our Saviour when he said, that we must be born of water and of the Spirit; an inattention of which Calvin set the example by contending, that the expressions "water and the Spirit mean only the Spirit, who cleanses after the manner of water:" and from a consequent confusion between regeneration and renovation or conversion, with which it has often been identified, but from which it ought clearly to be distinguished. Let me not be esteemed presumptuous. or insensible to the authority of a venerable name, if I observe, that a celebrated Prelate, who ranks especially high in the estimation of certain members of our Church, appears to have been under the influence of this confusion; for he unequivocally avers, that in many places of Scripture regeneration is ascribed to the holy ordinance of baptism, as one of the effects of it, and explains the bath of regeneration, mentioned by St. Paul, to signify that baptismal water, wherein we are buried with Christ; and nevertheless considers this baptismal regeneration, as merely admitting us members of the visible Church, and not as entitling us to eternal life: and contends for another regeneration, independent of the washing by water, and identified by him with conversion, renovation, and the like[1]. Such a change of heart may be wrought either before, or after baptism; in persons either regenerate or unregenerate; it qualifies them for regeneration, if unbaptized; it restores them to the privileges of baptism, which they may have forfeited by being hardened in sin; it accompanies those who are, humanly speaking, good, through the whole course of the Christian life. St. Paul was converted three days before he was baptized; the incestuous Co-

[1] See Bishop Hopkins's Works, vol. ii. p. 402, 468, 476.

rinthian, who had been excommunicated from the society of his brethren, was restored to them on his repentance; and Simon Magus, "who" (as Bishop Wilson says) "had received the washing of regeneration, and so was entitled to pardon upon his repentance[1]," was exhorted by the apostle to repent of his wickedness, and to "pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven:" and all of us are instructed to pray, agreeably to apostolical language, that "being regenerated and adopted for the children of God, we may be daily renewed by his Holy Spirit." But where are we instructed to pray after baptism for regeneration? Where is it intimated that the Corinthian was born again, subsequently to his fall? Where was Simon Magus admonished of the necessity of undergoing another new birth? Or where is St. Paul described as regenerated, until Ananias baptized him and washed away his sins? That he was converted, and that his heart was renewed, is evident from the language, which he uttered when he had fallen to the earth, and from the obedience, which he paid to the voice from heaven. That he was not regenerated until a later period is equally evident; for when Ananias called on him to be baptized, he was still under the pollution of his sins. I am aware, indeed, that we shall be told, that during the intermediate time he was experiencing the pangs and agonies of the new birth. The assertion may be permitted to pass; for a gratuitous assumption needs not to be seriously confuted. More deserving of our attention, and better calculated to give us correct notions, because more agreeable to the representations of Scripture, is the following statement of the learned and judicious Hooker:—"As we are not naturally men without birth, so neither are we Christian men in the eye of the Church of God, but by new birth;

[1] See Wilson's Works, vol. iv. p. 412.

nor, according to the manifest ordinary course of divine dispensation, new born, but by that baptism, which both declareth and maketh us Christians. In which respect we justly hold it to be the door of our actual entrance into God's house, the first apparent beginning of life; a seal perhaps to the grace of election before received, but to our sanctification here, a step that hath not any before it [1]."

It has been judged, that the error, which I am combating, derives support from the words of St. John, that "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot commit sin, because he is born of God [2]." Whence it is contended, that as baptismal regeneration does not secure a man from sin, another greater and better new birth must be added to supply the defect.

I shall not detain you at present by insisting on the impossibility of any man attaining to a state of sinless perfection, which these words, if strictly interpreted, assert. But I shall be satisfied with contending, that the conclusion is absurd, from a consideration of the words themselves, and of their context.

It will, I presume, be admitted, that the appellation of "born of God," and "the sons of God," are convertible terms; that if they occur in the same composition, and especially within a few sentences of each other, they must be understood of the same description of persons; at least, that what may be affirmed generally of the one, cannot be denied of the other. Now, in the passage before us, the Apostle affirms, that "whosoever is born of God cannot sin;" and a few verses before he affirms, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God;" so that connecting the two assertions together, he will be

[1] Ecclesiastical Polity, book v. chap. lx. vol. ii. p. 249. Oxf. edit.
[2] 1 John iii. 9.

made to affirm, that all the persons, to whom his epistle was addressed, were incapable of sinning; a hazardous affirmation this, if it be considered, that the epistle was certainly addressed to large societies of Christians; probably to those who were dispersed throughout the provinces of the greater and the Lesser Asia[1].

The truth appears to be, that St. John intended to give a description of those persons, who, having been regularly adopted for the sons of God by the appointed means, continued to act in a manner worthy of their adoption, by striving to profit by the grace of God, which would then effectually preserve them from the commission of the grosser sins. "Every regenerate person," says Bishop Taylor, in a passage which well explains the meaning of the Apostle, "is in a condition, whose very being is a contradiction and an opposite design to sin. When he was regenerate and born anew of water and of the Spirit, the seed of God, the original of piety was put into him, and bidden to increase and multiply. The seed of God in St. John is the same with the word of God in St. James, by which he begat us; and, as long as this remains, a regenerate person cannot be given up to sin: for when he is, he quits his baptism, he renounces the covenant, he alters his relation to God in the same degree as he enters into a state of sin[2]." The words of the Apostle, therefore, are to be considered as a caution to the regenerate, not to rely on their admission into filiation with God, as sufficient to secure their eternal happiness; but to live up to their high vocation, lest they should ultimately lose the privileges of their adoption by disobedience or unbelief, and become as though they had not been born again.

[1] See Preface to Pyle's Paraphrase.

[2] Bishop Taylor's Life of Christ, part ii. sect. 12.

Such was partly the design of the epistle, which was directed against the errors of the Nicolaitans, and other heretics, who taught, that the mere external profession of the Christian faith, and the privilege of being begotten into the true Church, would bring men to happiness, whatever were their lives and practices [1]. And such appears to be the proper import of the particular passage that I have quoted. But neither it, nor any other passage in St. John, nor any other text of Scripture, appears to me to authorize the doctrine of a second, or of any other distinct from baptismal regeneration.

Under the limitation here contended for, we may admit the position of an acute writer, that "the views, dispositions, and conduct of real Christians invariably characterize the regenerate children of God in Scripture [2]." Under the same limitation, too, may be admitted that other position, by which discredit is sometimes attempted to be brought on the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, that "there is an infallible connexion between regeneration and salvation, so that all, that were baptized in their infancy, must necessarily be saved [3]. Positions, which are true, precisely to the same extent as the assertion of the Apostle, that "by baptism we are dead unto sin, and are freed from sin;" and as the promise of our Saviour, that "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved;" in other words, they are true of those persons, who are preserved by faith and obedience in the possession of those privileges, to which by baptism they were admitted: but in a more extended signification they are by no means correct; and in the unqualified terms, wherein they are often conveyed, are calculated to perplex and mislead.

If now what has been advanced be true, it must

[1] Preface to Pyle's Paraphrase. [2] Overton, p. 409.
[3] See Allein's Alarm to the Unconverted, 1805, p. 39. Simpson's Plea for Religion, p. 56. Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons.

be an error for persons baptized in their infancy to describe any subsequent period of their lives as "a season of unregeneracy [1]," and to call upon men once baptized to become regenerate: for no other new birth can take place in this world. In fact, we know of only three lives, and three correspondent births. Once we are born into the natural life, being born of Adam: once we are born into the spiritual life, being born of water and of the Spirit: and once also, if we take care to profit by our baptismal privilege, we may be born into a life of glory, being born of the resurrection at the last day. Into our spiritual life, with which we are at present concerned, as into the others also, we are born once: to say that we are born into it more than once, has no foundation in reason, no analogy in nature, nor (what is much stronger to the purpose) has it any warrant in Scripture. The condition of the Christian life is well described by one of our Reformers, in a work bearing the sanction of authority, where he distinguishes the uses of the sacraments; that "as in baptism we have been once born again, so by the Lord's supper we are perpetually nourished and supported to a spiritual and eternal life [2]." It is indeed in our spiritual, as in our natural life: as we may be ill in health, and may grow better and recover, but born again we cannot be; so we may be spiritually ill, and again be renewed or reformed; but in that case we still hope for everlasting salvation upon the ground of the covenant, into which we were originally baptized: for inasmuch as there is but "one baptism," so there is but one regeneration in this world; and as we cannot be baptized again, so cannot we be a second time regenerated, or a second time be born again.

Let it not be supposed that the present argument

[1] Hawker's Zion's Pilgrim, p. 3.
[2] Noel, Catech. Enchir. Theol. II. 222.

is a mere question of words; far indeed, very far from it. The abuse of words in this, as in many other cases, leads to material errors in opinion, and to serious evils in practice.

Let us figure to ourselves a man, educated according to the principles of the Church of England, but seduced from "the words of truth and soberness," which she delivers on the subject of regeneration; and enticed or terrified into the popular belief that he is no Christian, and is not in a state of salvation until he feel the pangs of the modern new birth. No violence will be done to nature and probability, if we suppose him reasoning with himself in some such manner as the following:

'When an infant, I was baptized according to the order of the national Church; and the Minister pronounced by her directions, that I was regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and received by our most merciful Father as his own child by adoption. As soon as I was able to learn, I was taught what a great blessing was then conferred upon me; and that, by having been admitted to baptism, I had been made a child of God, and had undergone a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness. When I had been sufficiently instructed to be confirmed by the Bishop, I heard from him a repetition of the comfortable assurance, that God had vouchsafed to regenerate me by water and the Holy Ghost, and to give me forgiveness of all my sins. And I have since periodically joined with my brother Christians in making our grateful acknowledgments to Almighty God for being regenerate and made his children by adoption and grace.

'The Church has thus uniformly instructed me to look back upon regeneration as a thing which is past; she has never taught me to look forward to it, as a thing which is to come; she has never bid me desire and pray for it, as a thing necessary; she has never warned me to expect it, as a thing

expedient; she has never led me to regard it, as a thing possible. I am not, however, convinced, notwithstanding her assurances, comfortable as they were, and her instructions, sound and scriptural as they appeared to be, that Verily, verily, I must be born again.

'What can I think of such a Church? Can I regard her as a pillar and ground of the truth? Can I reverence her, who so grossly deluded me by a visionary regeneration, and threw an impenetrable veil over that which alone is effectual? Who taught me to think that I was in the way of salvation, when I had not yet passed the threshold? Who made me believe I was a child of God, when I was still a child of the devil? Who treated me as a Christian, when I was nothing but a "baptized heathen?" Away with such an unscriptural Church! With such a mother of deceit and falsehood! Away with such a monster from the earth!

'What too shall I think of the Minister, who instructed me, according to the Liturgy and Articles of that Church, of which he is too faithful a son? He recited to me her opinions in words of her own providing; and he pretended to support them from the pulpit, on the authority of the Bible. But he is blind; he is ignorant; he saw for me visions of peace, when there was no peace; he spoke of my having been quickened by the Holy Spirit, who had infused into me a new principle of life, when I was still dead in trespasses and sins. Can such an one be a preacher of the Gospel?

'What again shall I think of baptism; of that which I have been wont to consider as the laver of regeneration; of that, which I have been taught is a sacrament, consisting of an outward visible sign, and an inward spiritual grace? Truly it doth not regenerate; it conveys no effectual regeneration; it is destitute of an inward spiritual grace; it is no sacrament; it is a non-essential.'

It will not have appeared perhaps that a syllable has been here suggested, more than would probably be uttered, or than probably has been in effect uttered, by persons in the situation that I have supposed. And if a man can bring his mind to think thus meanly of baptism, ordained as it was by Christ himself, with a promise of salvation annexed to its legitimate administration; what will he think of Christ's other ordinances? What of the other sacrament, the holy communion of Christ's body and blood? If the spiritual part of baptism be denied, why should the spiritual part of the communion be allowed? If water be not really the laver of regeneration, why should bread and wine be spiritually the body and blood of Christ, and convey strength and refreshment to the soul? Surely it is not too much to affirm, that the stripping of one of God's ordinances of that, which constitutes its essential value has a natural tendency to bring the efficacy of the others into question, and to diminish at least, if not to annihilate, a man's respect for them as means of spiritual grace.

In this condition perhaps he will continue, sometimes exulting in hope, and sometimes sunk in despondency: waiting for an extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit, and neglecting the means of procuring his ordinary sanctifying graces; until the moment approach, in which, under the influence of some powerful preacher, whose word is sharper than a two-edged sword, he is to undergo his mysterious regeneration; a regeneration, wherein, instead of being born himself of water, and of the Spirit, Christ is to be "born in his heart as he was born in the Virgin's womb[1];" a regeneration, without undergoing the pangs of which he is taught that "he may flatter himself that he may go to heaven, but will certainly find himself miserably mistaken in

[1] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 307.

the end[1];" when, having experienced a state of horror, agony, and despair, which mocks the language of description, and which it were too painful, if it were possible, to describe; a state of pangs and travails, which is necessary to be sustained by every one ere Christ be formed in him; a state, which has been compared by those who have felt its horrors, to the agonies of death, the pains of hell, and tortures inflicted by infuriate devils[2]; he fancies that he is begotten again! that he is born of the Holy Spirit of God!

What will be the future life of a man thus regenerated, I do not venture to pronounce. But in noticing some evil consequences of a doctrine, which, for the spiritual grace attendant upon the holy ordinance of Christ, substitutes a wild and fanciful regeneration of man's invention, we may be allowed to speculate on the effects likely to be produced in one thus initiated to the new birth. To speculate, did I say, on probable effects? Rather to call to mind effects which have notoriously ensued, and to consider whether they are not such as sober reason might have foreseen.

The history of some popular modern sects does strictly tally with the expectations of reason; and if among the regenerated of later days, who have been thus tormented into the new birth, may have subsequently been driven through every species of extravagance to the very extreme of irrecoverable madness[3]; if many, after a temporary exultation in the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, have relapsed into intolerable perplexities, distraction, and despair[4]; if many, after fancying themselves puri-

[1] Whitefield's Works, vol. i. p. 18.

[2] Wesley's Journals, and Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. iii. p. 23, and following pages.

[3] See an instance in Wesley's Journals, No. V. p. 81. Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. iii. p. 11—14.

[4] Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. ii. p. 3, 140.

fied even as Christ is pure, have turned back and become twofold more the children of hell than before [1]; if many, who pretended to be conformed to the image of Christ, have at that very instant continued under the dominion of grievous sins; if many, who imagine themselves thoroughly renewed in the image of the meek and lowly Jesus, swell with pharisaical pride, thanking God that they are not as other men are; and if almost all regard their less favoured brethren with scorn, and say "stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou;" and condemn those who admit not their pretensions, and discountenance their conceits, as unconverted unregenerate sinners; it is no more than might have been expected from men, who depreciate God's holy ordinance, deny its sanctifying efficacy, and convert the workings of a feverish brain, or the impulse of visionary feelings, into the operation of the Spirit of truth.

Such a doctrine the Enthusiast may teach, and the deluded multitude may follow. But it was a very different regeneration, for which Paul prepared the Gentiles, when he was sent to "open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness, to light, and from the power of Satan unto God [2];" and it was a very different vision to which he was obedient, when he repelled the charge of insanity by speaking forth the words of truth and soberness; and forced from the royal Jew that memorable and disinterested confession, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Now unto God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in the unity of one Godhead, be all honour and glory for ever. Amen.

[1] Wesley's Farther Appeal, p. 130. [2] Acts xxvi. 18.

TRACT II.

MATT. xviii. 2, 3.

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.
And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

ALL the dispensations of Providence are tempered by an harmonious principle; and in the moral, as well as in the natural world, every effect has an evident relation to its cause. In operations, whether intellectual or material, it is irrational to expect similar results in cases, between which an important difference prevails, as to the powers of the agent, the disposition of the patient, and the numerous contingent circumstances by which they are respectively modified.

Eye-witnesses of the life, miracles, and resurrection of Christ; capable from their personal observation of demonstrating the fulfilment of ancient prophecies; armed themselves also with miraculous power, and endued by the Holy Ghost with the faculty of speaking the language of every nation under heaven; the Apostles preached the doctrines of Christianity to men, whose senses bore testimony to the supernatural endowments of the preachers; and thus, "in the de-

monstration of the Spirit and of power," they converted multitudes to a stedfast belief in Christ, and to consequent holiness of living. But therefore to suppose that the eloquence of a mere human preacher, assisted only by the ordinary visitations of divine grace, is to be followed by the immediate conversion of multitudes of sinners, to whom the truths of the Gospel have been long familiar, to uniform habits of Christian purity, were as gross an absurdity as to suppose, that a peasant could verify the boast of Archimedes, and move the earth; or that an astronomer could realize the fiction of romance, and divert the sun from its orbit.

The doctrine of conversion, as it is delivered by some of our modern sectaries, is so much at variance with the more sober, more rational, and (I trust) more evangelical doctrine of the national clergy; and it is so vehemently enforced as absolutely necessary to salvation, and the preaching of it is represented as so indispensable a criterion of the preaching of the Gospel[1], that it requires to be carefully examined; and it is so closely connected, and by some persons so thoroughly identified with regeneration, which was examined in the preceding discourse, that it naturally presents itself for the subject of our present reflections.

Conversion, according to our notions, may not improperly be said to consist of a rational conviction of sin, and sense of its wretchedness and danger; of a sincere penitence and sorrow of heart, at having incurred the displeasure of a holy God; of stedfast purposes of amendment with the blessing of the divine grace; of a regular and diligent employment of all the appointed means of grace; and of a real change of heart and life, of affections and conduct, and a resolute perseverance in well-doing.

[1] See Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 130.

The triumph of such conversion as this is not attended by alternations of extreme joy and despondency; of the most ecstatic rapture, and the most gloomy despair; sometimes by heavenly exultation, and sometimes by the agonies of hell. It has little of what is brilliant and dazzling to decorate; little of what is magnificent and imposing to dignify and exalt it. It cannot be described as intended by the Lord to set the world in a flame [1]: the minister, who is God's instrument to effect it, cannot be pompously represented to be carried as on eagle's wings [2]; or be elevated in comparison with Joshua, going from city to city, and subduing the devoted nations: its direction cannot be said to be marked out by a sign from heaven, as the cloud employed by Providence to conduct the people of Israel on their march through the wilderness [3]: its progress cannot be described to be terrible as an army with banners [4]: its effects cannot be extolled into a rivalry with the success of the victorious and imperial Constantine [5]. But if its operations are slow, they are certain; if its effects are milder, they are more secure: if its conquests are less extensive, and it draws a less numerous crowd of suppliants at its chariot wheels, it exerts a more permanent dominion over those whom it has subdued. Unambitious of earthly distinction, and contented with doing good, its throne is the humble and contrite spirit, and its sceptre is righteousness and peace.

But I am anticipating remarks, which might appear more pertinent after the comparison, which I purpose to institute in the present discourse, between the scriptural and methodistical notions of conversion. The result will probably authorize us to conclude, that by declining to adopt the latter, and

[1] Whitefield's Works, vol. i. p. 200.
[2] Ibid. vol. i. p. 367.
[3] Ibid. vol. i. 370, 407, 451, 477.
[4] Ibid. vol. i. p. 398.
[5] Wesley's Farther Appeal, p. 92.

by representing conversion with a very different complexion from those artificial colours, with which it has been disguised by the enthusiast, we are ascribing to it its legitimate character, and maintaining the simplicity of the Gospel and "the truth as it is in Jesus."

"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven:" such was our Saviour's warning to the unbelieving Jews; and it was a warning highly necessary to be impressed, not upon them alone, but upon men of every description to whom the Gospel was originally preached. The Gospel militated against the prejudices, the pride, and the corrupt passions of all men: nor, unless they were subdued and superseded by humility, docility, modesty, simplicity, and that comparative innocence, which are the most distinguishing qualities of childhood, could it be effectually received. Among the Jews, he who obstinately resisted, and he who more actively persecuted, the faith of Christ; the Pharisee, who commended his own righteousness, and trusted to an exact performance of the ritual ordinances of the law; the Sadducee, who denied a resurrection; the Scribe, who was zealous for the Mosaic institutions; even the disciple, who was ambitious of sitting on the right hand or on the left of his Master, in what he expected would be a temporal kingdom; and generally every child of Abraham, who was habitually and fondly attached to the national belief of the perpetuity of their exclusive privileges: among the Gentiles, those who were spoiled and seduced by philosophy and vain deceit; the sceptic, who doubted, and the infidel, who denied the existence or the providence of a Supreme Being; and the idolater, who worshipped the creature more than the Creator, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man: and universally, both among Jews and among Gen-

tiles, those who were living under the dominion of sin, or were not duly convinced of the necessity of a Redeemer: every man, who was subject to prepossessions such as these, (and they comprise almost every soul of man that breathed,) must have been converted from his errors whether in principle or in practice: his heart must have been opened, and softened, and rendered capable of receiving fresh and totally different impressions, before he could become a believer in the truth, or a performer of the duties of the Gospel.

Every man, who now also is under the influence of similar prepossessions, must now also undergo a similar change. Every unbeliever and every sinner, although made by baptism a member of Christ and a child of God, must be, in a certain sense, converted, if he would ultimately succeed to his inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. But to fancy that every Christian whatever must experience a conversion in order to be in a state of salvation; —to assert, with the Arminian Founder of Methodism, that "he who knows no time, when he had need of such a vast and mighty change as a change from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, from death unto life, may by this also know, if he give himself leave to think, that he is not born of the Spirit, that he has never yet known God, but has mistaken the voice of nature for the voice of God [1]:" —to suppose, with his Calvinistic competitor, "that in every Christian congregation there are two sorts of people, some that know Christ, and some that do not know him, some that are converted, and some that are strangers to conversion [2];"—and to assert that "every person must be converted or be damned, and that they who die in an unconverted state must be damned for ever [3]:"—to contend, as is

[1] Wesley's Sermons, vol. i. p. 157.
[2] Whitefield's Works, vol. v. p. 338.
[3] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 124, 292.

stated to be the opinion of our self-denominated evangelical brethren by their Apologist, that "in order to a state of salvation, a change of mind, of views, and dispositions must be effected in *every person*, wherever born, however educated, or of whatever external conduct[1]:"—this is a conceit which revelation warrants not, and which reason and experience disclaim.

That no man, however near he may approach to the perfection of the Christian character, and however lovely an example he may exhibit of the beauty of holiness, is absolutely perfect and free from the dominion of sin, I readily admit. Every man has been undoubtedly guilty of "sins, negligences, and ignorances," for which he will be brought to account, and will need the atoning blood of the Redeemer. But some humble Christians also undoubtedly there are, who, having been once regenerated by water and the Holy Spirit, have so followed his heavenly motions, and improved his sanctifying graces; have so pursued the calm and blameless tenour of their way; have preserved that childlike simplicity of character, and that childlike innocence of conduct, that their angels may not blush to behold the face of their heavenly Father.

Such was the conversation even under the Jewish law of Zacharias and Elizabeth, "who were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless[2]." And if the ministration of Moses, which was in comparison a ministration of death, was thus glorious, how shall not the ministration of Christ, which is the ministration of the Spirit, be rather glorious? How shall not the covenant of God be established, wherein he hath bound himself by an oath to Abraham, that he would grant us a power to "serve him

[1] Overton's True Churchman, &c. p. 160.
[2] Luke i. 6. 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8.

in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life[1]?"

And are we to be told that Christians such as these, must experience an entire change of heart, a thorough conversion of their ways? It is not to ascribe any merit to their righteousness; it is no prejudice to the precious efficacy of the Redeemer's blood, or to the all-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit, (God forbid!) to say that they need no conversion. By that blood they have been purified from the original corruption of their nature; by that blood they have been cleansed of their actual sins; by the Holy Spirit of God they have been regenerated; his preventing grace hath conducted them; his assisting grace hath co-operated with, and given effect to their zealous endeavours to persevere in the course of piety and virtue; his sanctifying influence renews and invigorates them day by day. Let God have all the glory of their continuance in their Christian career; but let it not be judged necessary that they should undergo "a change of mind, of views, and dispositions," when that change must be from holiness unto sin; let them not be subject to a conversion, which must be the very reverse of turning them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

It is the remark of a learned prelate, to whose labours in the discharge of a weighty and important office many of us have been indebted for instruction in sound theology[2], that "we are not told in Scripture, as we are now imperiously called upon, to divide our hearers, being believers in Christianity in common, into the classes of converted and uncon-

[1] Luke i. 76.

[2] It may be necessary to observe, in explanation of this allusion, which is the only one of a local or occasional nature retained in the present edition of these Sermons, that they were delivered in Oxford, where the venerable Bishop of London, lately deceased, had long filled the station of Regius Professor of Divinity, with great honour to himself, and benefit to the University.

verted. There is indeed a conversion from infidelity: or a conversion from sin, or from any particular sin, or course of sinning. He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way (so saith St. James most divinely in a far other strain, and in the true spirit of Christianity) shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. But that among men, baptized as Christians, taught from their infancy to believe the doctrines and practice the duties of Christianity, a special conversion also at some period of their life is necessary to stamp them true Christians, is an unheard-of thing in the Gospel, and is plainly a novel institution of man. Thus taken it is a spurious substitute for the true hinge of Christianity, repentance; with which in Scripture we find it conjoined as one and the same: Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out [1]."

To represent conversion, then, as universally necessary to all Christians, because it was universally necessary to all men, before they became Christians, or because it is necessary to all, who, whether through unbelief or impiety, have become apostates, as it were, from the religion which they professed, is a distinguished and fundamental error in the methodistical creed. And it is likely to redound very little either to the advancement, or to the honour, of genuine Christianity, thus to confound those who are estranged from that faith or obedience, which are the duty of its professors, with those, who having remembered their Creator, and devoutly submitted to be taught of him from their youth up, have conscientiously endeavoured both to believe and to live, as it becometh the followers of Christ.

In describing conversion as necessary to every professor of the Gospel, some of our self-denominated evangelical brethren appear to err in common with our more extravagant accusers: for, notwithstanding

[1] Bishop Randolph's Charge at Bangor, 1808, p. 16.

the more sober and qualified language of one, who seems to step forward as the advocate of their cause, and whom I always wish to mention with honour for his Christian moderation[1], their professed, and (if I mistake not) their more accredited advocate affirms, that "in order to a state of salvation such a change must be effected in every person, wherever born, however educated, or of whatever external conduct." In the nature of the thing, however, and in the method of its being effected, where previous habits of irreligion and worldly-mindedness render it necessary, I trust we do not materially differ; for my own part, considering it in the light, in which it is represented by the former of these writers, or understanding with the latter, that it consists in "the actual reformation of the heart, and character; that the author of this happy change is the Holy Spirit, but that it is generally effected, and is always to be sought after, in the diligent use of the appointed means of grace; that it is no instantaneous operation, which finishes the whole business of religion at once, but that it is the serious commencement of a work, which it requires the vigorous exertions of the whole life to complete[2]:" considering conversion, I say, in this light, I can cheerfully concur with our brethren in maintaining the necessity of such a change to every one, who is satisfied with mere nominal Christianity, or with any thing short of true Christian holiness both of heart and life; although I cannot but be of opinion that we are adhering more closely to the simplicity of evangelical truth, whilst, with our venerable Church, we impress the necessity of such a change upon our hearers by the appellation of a true repentance; and that we are at the same time more free from causing perplexity in the minds of those, who are of

[1] See Zeal without Innovation, pages 96, and following.

[2] Overton, p. 162, 163.

themselves little capable of discrimination; and that we more unequivocally discountenance the unwarranted conceits, by declining the phraseology, of enthusiasm.

To proceed: as the Methodists err in respect of the extent, by multiplying the subjects, of conversion: they err no less in respect of the rapidity, with which it is to be effected. It is represented as an operation, which is completed always suddenly; very frequently in a moment; instantaneously, and with the rapidity of lightning. "The Gospel," said one of their leaders, "like its Author, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and if preached as it ought to be, will prick numbers to the heart, and extort the cry of the trembling gaoler, What must I do to be saved? as surely now, as it did seventeen hundred years ago. These are the sudden and surprising effects I always desire to have; and I heartily pray God," he adds, addressing himself to a contemporary Prelate, "your lordship and all your clergy may always see such effects in consequence of their preaching [1]." And more fully, in order that the notion of an instantaneous change may not appear deficient in parallels, and unsupported by the authority of Scripture, we are informed by the other great leader of the schism, who once entertained doubts concerning the doctrine, of which he afterwards became a determined advocate, "I could not comprehend what was meant by an instantaneous work; I could not understand, how this faith could be given in a moment; how a man could at once be turned from darkness to light; from sin and misery to righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost. I searched the Scriptures again, touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles; but to my utter astonishment found scarce any other instances there of other than instantaneous con-

[1] Whitefield's Works, vol. iv. p. 13.

versions; scarce any other so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth [1]."

Now that we may not lose by such a summary reference to Scripture the benefit of that light, which a more ample examination of the instances there recorded is admirably calculated to supply; we will take a view of some of the most striking examples, which it contains, of sudden and instantaneous conversion; carrying with us at the same time this, not unimportant, remark, that the conversions there recorded are for the most part, if not entirely, conversions of Jews and Heathens, that is, of unbelievers, to a belief in the Christian revelation; and not of hardened sinners to habits of piety and virtue. Their conversion indeed was followed by the fruits of a Christian faith; but the conversion itself was a turning from darkness unto light; from the obscurity of heathen superstition, or the comparative twilight of the Jewish revelation, to the Christian dayspring which visited them from on high: which first enlightened their understandings, and then guided their feet into the way of peace.

In the first place then, I observe, that, where the conversion was sudden or instantaneous, it was the consequence of miraculous evidence to the truth. When the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost added to the Church three thousand souls, they were men, who had been "amazed and confounded" by the effusion of the Holy Ghost, and the supernatural gift of tongues [2]. When five thousand men believed the word preached by Peter and John, it was whilst they were "filled with wonder and amazement" at the restoration of him, who had been lame from his mother's womb [3]. It was the sight of the paralytic, who had been restored to health by the word of Peter,

[1] Wesley's Journals, No. II. p. 92. Coke's Life of Wesley, p. 443.
[2] Acts ii. [3] Ibid. iii. iv.

which occasioned all the people of Lydda and Saron to " turn unto the Lord [1]." It was the blindness inflicted by Paul on Elymas the sorcerer, which made the Proconsul of Asia " believe, in astonishment at the doctrine of the Lord [2]." It was the supernatural earthquake, and the composure, little less supernatural, of Paul and Silas, which forced from the jailor at Philippi his earnest inquiry, " Sirs, what shall I do to be saved [3]?" It was " the light from heaven above the brightness of the sun," and the voice of " the heavenly vision," which converted Paul himself from an active persecutor, into a most zealous propagator, of the truth [4]. Such are the most striking examples, which the evangelical history affords, of sudden or instantaneous conversions. And need I insist more fully on the causes, to which they are to be immediately referred? Need I repeat a former observation, that, where such causes do not exist, such effects are not to be expected? And am I not warranted in affirming, notwithstanding the pretensions which some of the abettors of modern enthusiasm have advanced, that such causes do not at present exist?

In cases such as these, the chain of interrogatories employed heretofore by the Puritan, and now adopted by the Methodist, might easily have been answered; and the convert might have distinctly specified the place, the year, the month, the day, nay, the very hour of the day, wherein he was wrought upon by the divine grace. But even in the primitive ages of the Church, we perceive the justice of our blessed Lord's remark, that " the kingdom of God cometh not with observation [5];" and that more frequently it is " as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed

[1] Acts ix. [2] Ibid. xiii. [3] Ibid. xvi.
[4] Ibid. ix. xxii. xxvi. [5] Luke xvii. 20.

should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how [1]."

Agreeable to this, it is to be noticed, secondly, that some of the conversions specified in the Acts of the Apostles were more gradually effected than those which have now been cited. And it is equally worthy of notice, and it is precisely what a sober inquirer would expect, that those are the very conversions, which were not wrought by the immediate interposition of miraculous power, but were the consequence of a cool and deliberate attention to less overbearing evidence. If the conversion were wrought by a miracle, it must, one would suppose, be instantaneous: if resulting from the deductions of reason, it must in course be slower and more gradual.

Impressed with the "word of exhortation" delivered by St. Paul, but perhaps not thoroughly persuaded by his doctrine, the Gentiles of Antioch "besought that the same words might be preached unto them the next sabbath-day [2]." The interval was probably employed in meditations and inquiries on the subject of his discourse; and when, on the appointed day, the Apostle resumed his argument, and tendered to the Gentiles the same salvation in Christ, which he had offered to the Jews, we read that "they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed;" as many as were disposed by previous preparation for eternal life; as were fit or well disposed for the kingdom of heaven [3]. When Paul preached in the synagogue of Thessalonica, some Jews believed; not instantly, upon his first addressing them; but when on three sabbath-days he had reasoned with them out of the Scriptures; opening and alleging, that "Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this

[1] Mark iv. 26, 27. [2] Acts xiii. [3] Luke ix. 62.

Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ[1]." And at Berea they received the word with readiness of mind, and "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed:" not suddenly, for that their conviction was gradual, the passage unquestionably indicates; not being "brought to God by force," as Whitefield affirms of his modern converts[2]; not "finding God irresistibly acting upon their soul," as Wesley pronounces of believers, that "the grace which brings faith and thereby salvation into the soul is irresistible at that moment[3];" not wrought upon by the Spirit of God, operating independently of, and in a manner distinguished from evidence, and argument, and moral suasion; but subsequently to, and in consequence of, their daily investigation of the Scriptures, and ingenuous comparison between them and the doctrine of the Apostle.

These examples may, I trust, be regarded as just specimens of the conversions which prevailed in the primitive ages of Christianity, and which are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles; nor are they mutilated, or distorted, to give colour to a favourite system. To me they appear to mark out a very evident line of distinction between two different kinds of conversion; the one being rapidly effected by the overbearing evidence of the finger of God; the other being the slow and progressive result of a deliberate attention to the ordinary methods of conviction, and a willing and rational acquiescence in that result. This kind of conversion best agrees with the testimony of Irenæus, that "God redeems men from the apostate spirit not by force, but by persuasion;" and with the notion, which others of the ancient Christians give of faith, consisting of a deliberate assent of the understand-

[1] Acts xvii. [2] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 94.
[3] Wesley's Journals, No. V. p. 107.

ing, and a free consent of the will. "Faith, saith Clement of Alexandria, is a spontaneous acceptance and compliance with divine religion." And "To be made at first," saith Justin Martyr, was not in our power: but God persuadeth us to follow those things which he liketh, choosing by the rational faculties which he hath given us; and so leadeth us to faith."

Examples of the latter kind it is surely most reasonable to expect, in times subsequent to the age of miracles. Where the miraculous testimony has ceased, it is to be expected, that the instantaneous effect should cease also: and as to the particular example of St. Paul, which we have already seen cited, and on which the supporters of this novel doctrine of conversion are much disposed to dwell, I adopt the remark of an invaluable writer on this and its kindred topics, that, "the conversion of St. Paul was not according to the common way and rule, but extraordinary; in regard whereof he may very well style himself an *abortive*. For the ordinary course is not for the kingdom of heaven to offer violence to us, and take us by force; but for us to do so by it[1]." "The dispensation of the Gospel," says the same judicious writer, "which is the ministration of the Spirit, goes forth doubtless with a mighty power of conviction; but how far it works upon particular persons affected under the influence of it, is not so easily to be resolved. There are in the conversion of sinners cases extraordinary, which must not be drawn into example, nor prejudice the general rule, as in St. Paul, Austin, &c. But ordinarily, that there is some disposition and temper of mind, more apt than others to receive the effectual impressions of it, is most certain. Such is the honest and good heart in the parable; such are the honest and meek, and the poor in spirit; such as do the truth and the will

[1] Examination of Tilenus, p. 373.

of God, so far as their information serves them; such are the weary, and heavy-laden, and the like; they are resembled to sheep, and to babes; and are said to be of God, to have learned the Father, and to know him. These are said to be ordained, that is, disposed, and in a fit posture for eternal life; and of this ingenuous and noble temper were the people of Berea. They were, as it were, in the suburbs or confines, not far from the kingdom of God; and upon the first call by the word of grace, they obeyed and stept into it [1]."

Not that I would be understood to assert, that Providence may not perhaps, even in the present day, be sometimes pleased to interpose in a manner more awful and impressive, than is agreeable to the ordinary course of his proceedings; and to arrest the sinner in his career of infidelity or wickedness, and to turn him from darkness unto light.

But it is the error of enthusiasm to invert the order of God's proceedings; and to mistake that for the rule, which in reality constitutes the exception. Under the influence of Methodism, which has been again and again represented by its founders and its disciples as an extraordinary dispensation of Providence, "in favour of which God wrought a new thing upon the earth;" supported by the evidence of even "greater things than the raising of dead bodies to life [2]!" and such, that "if men will not believe the evidence God has given that he sent it, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead [3]," men are taught to expect these instantaneous and irresistible conversions as matters of course and of necessity. "Are not all these things," demands its Calvinistic founder, after giving his own colouring to the examples of miraculous conversion re-

[1] Womack on False Principles, p. 227.
[2] Wesley's Sermons, vol. vi. p. 66.
[3] Whitefield's Works, vol. iv. p. 18. vol. i. p. 50.

corded in the Acts, "Are not all these things written for our learning? Is not God the same yesterday, to-day and for ever? And may he not now, as well as formerly, reveal his arm, and display his power, in bringing sinners home to himself, as suddenly and instantaneously as in the first planting of the Gospel Church [1]?" The consequence must naturally be, a carelessness about growing in grace, and a neglect of the outward regular means: and this carelessness and neglect are augmented by their being ostentatiously reminded of those, who are said to have been recovered from the most settled despair and the most excruciating horror by a kind of supernatural interposition, after having in vain habitually practised all the means of grace [2]; and of others, who are said to have been impelled to wean themselves from inveterate wickedness, and to embrace a religious life, by a strong preternatural agency, without having practised those means at all [3].

It is true, we hear them telling their deluded followers, that they ought to be converted; expostulating with them for not choosing to be converted, and for putting off their conversion, for not turning to God directly; intreating them to repent and be converted. Yet wherefore? when in almost the same breath they tell them, that the author of this conversion is the Holy Ghost; that it is not their own free will; it is not moral suasion; that nothing short of the influence of the Spirit of the living God can effect this change in their hearts [4].

Yet it was by outward and ordinary means, by evidence and arguments and moral suasion, that conversions of the ordinary kind were effected by the Apostles themselves. Such we have seen to be the

[1] Whitefield's Works, vol. iv. p. 161.

[2] Wesley's Journals, No. III. p. 15. 32. 54.

[3] See Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. ii. p. 146.—Wesley's Journals, No. III. p. 109.

[4] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, page 118, and following.

case with respect to the Gentiles of Antioch, and the Jews of Thessalonica and Berea. And such was the mode adopted by Paul, when "the Lord opened the heart" of Lydia of Thyatira, not to believe, but "to attend to the things spoken by" the Apostle [1]: and by Philip, when he unfolded to the Ethiopian eunuch the memorable prophecy of Isaiah, and "began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus [2]."

Even when miraculous attestations were conferred in immediate aid of their ministry, the Apostles employed sound and sober arguments to convince the reason; and directed their efforts to enlighten the understandings, rather than to excite the passions and feelings, of their hearers. The Sermon of Peter, which was occasioned by the astonishment consequent upon the miraculous gift of tongues, was occupied in convincing the inquiring multitude, that there was no allusion in their claim to inspiration; that it was a completion of one of their ancient prophecies, several others of which had also been fulfilled in the person of Christ; and in pressing on their minds the miraculous acts of his life, and his resurrection, and ascension into heaven. It was with similar arguments, that he wrought upon the minds of the five thousand, who flocked together on the cure of the lame man. And the conversion of Cornelius, the first fruits of the Gentile world, which had been begun by a supernatural vision, vouchsafed him in consideration of his acts of devotion and charity, correspondent to the proportion of knowledge which he possessed, was promoted by Peter bearing witness to the miracles and resurrection of Christ [3].

Very unlike these words of truth and soberness is the character of that preaching, which the missionary of Methodism, protesting as he does against the operation of moral persuasion upon the soul [4], em-

[1] Acts xvi. [2] Ibid. viii. [3] Ibid. x.
[4] Whitefield's Works, vol. i. p. 113.

ploys for the instrument of his instantaneous conversions. Reason is left to slumber on her post; and her authority is superseded at least, if not annihilated, while, with language the most portentous, enforced by the most vehement articulation and the wildest extravagance of gesture, he gives the rein to the imagination, alarms the feelings, and stimulates the passions; now exciting an ecstatic love for Christ in terms of rapture, of which it hath been truly observed, that "enthusiasts and pious mystics have been remarkably fond[1]," but which more become a preacher of the Koran, than of the Gospel; now dwelling with horrible delight on the terrors of God's wrath, and figuring to the shrinking mind, with a minute and frightful particularity, the agonies of hell and the torments of the damned.

The effect corresponds with its cause. But I dare not lay before your eyes specific and detailed examples of those formidable symptoms, which accompany the conversion of the disciple, and testify the efficacious power of the teacher. Alternate extremes of weeping and of laughter; sobs and shrieks and groans and wailing and gnashing of teeth; the voice now stifled by agony, and now bursting forth in tones of execration, blasphemy, and despair; tremors and faintings and dropping to the ground, as if struck by lightning and thunder; paleness and torpor; convulsions and contortions, as in the pangs of death, as out of the belly of hell; things terrible to behold, too terrible to be borne, and which words cannot describe: such are the symptoms of conversion, which the very preachers, who have excited them, have gloried to survey, have exulted and triumphed in enumerating[2].

A scene more melancholy hardly presented itself

[1] Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 81.

[2] See Wesley's Journals, No. III. p. 32. 36. 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56. 61, 62. 71. 74, 75. 79. 82. 95. 98, &c. &c. Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. iii. p. 23, and following pages. Ibid. p. 135, 136.

to the powerful imagination of Milton[1], when he described, as the most loathsome consequence and most compendious testimony of human corruption, his visionary lazar-house,

> ——— wherein were laid
> Numbers of all diseas'd; all maladies
> Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms
> Of heartsick agony,———
> Convulsions, epilepsies,———
> Demoniack phrenzy, moping melancholy,
> And moonstruck madness———
> Dire was the tossing, deep the groans; despair
> Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch.

But they are very different sensations from those of triumph and exultation, which he attributes to the conscious author of such misery, when he represents him exclaiming,

> O miserable mankind, to what fall
> Degraded, to what wretched state reserved?
> ——————————— Can thus
> The image of God in man, created once
> So goodly and erect, though faulty since,
> To such unsightly sufferings be debas'd,
> Under human pains? Why should not man,
> Retaining still divine similitude,
> In part from such deformities be free,
> And for his Maker's name exempt?

Such sentiments have undoubtedly passed through the minds of many considerate men, on perusing the annals of modern enthusiasm; and contemplating their nature, fallen indeed and corrupted, but renewed, and repaired, and rendered capable of being conformed again to the image of Christ, thus cruelly debased to the extreme point of degradation.

And are we to be referred to Scriptures for parallels to such extravagances as these? Are we to be sent to Scripture for examples of men in a state of intellectual desolation, reduced to a level with the

[1] This paragraph was not delivered from the pulpit.

very beasts that perish, in order that they may be clothed with sinless perfection, and revel in the assurance of happiness? Is not this more like making them pass through fire to Moloch, than leading them with willing steps to rest upon God's holy hill?

The Bible, however, is before us: let us turn to the cases of conversion which it commemorates: and let us take them for the criterion of our opinions. And what resemblance to these enormities, which are described as the frequent proofs and symptoms of conversion;—or even to those pangs and travails of soul, which, we are taught, that *all* experience before a thorough conversion is effected in the heart[1];—to those "dreadful conflicts," that "plowing up of the heart[2]," which the enthusiast tells us "*must* take place in us, or we shall never be prepared for the kingdom of heaven;"—what resemblance to these extravagances shall we discover in the compunction of the converts on the day of Pentecost, which led to the rational inquiry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" and was followed by their "gladly receiving the word, and being immediately baptized?" What resemblance to these extravagances do we perceive in the alarm of the keeper of the prison, which filled him indeed with a trembling anxiety for his salvation, but which did not disable him from listening to the word of the Lord, and attending carefully on its preachers and embracing the Gospel on a conviction of its truth? What symptom of an alienated mind do we discern in the considerate behaviour of Sergius Paulus? or in the collected language and calm joy of the Ethiopian eunuch? or in the reasoning and investigations of the Jews at Thessalonica and Berea? or in the exultation and praises of the lame man, or in the won-

[1] Whitefield's Short Account of God's Dealings with the Rev. George Whitefield, p. 73.

[2] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 94.

der and amazement of those who beheld his cure, at Jerusalem? or in the gladness and thanksgivings of the Gentiles at Antioch? or in the attention and humility of Lydia of Thyatira? or in the temperate conduct of the centurion and his household at Cæsarea, or of the multitude at Lydda and Saron? Or, that we may meet the enthusiast on his favourite and strongest ground, what features of resemblance can we trace between the conversion of the disciples of Methodism, and that of the Apostle St. Paul? We have authority for affirming, that, after Paul had recovered from the instantaneous effect of "the heavenly vision," which met him on the way, and he was led by the hand and brought into Damascus, "he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink;" that he prayed; and that he was visited with a supernatural notice of the approaching restoration of his sight. But on what authority is it affirmed, that during these three days he continued not only sick in body, but "under great agonies of soul [1]," labouring (according to the phraseology of enthusiasm) in the pangs and travails of the new birth? That the repentance of St. Paul for his persecution of the Gospel was sincere and perfect, and that the distress of mind which he experienced on a discovery of his error, however "verily he had thought with himself" that he had been in the line of his duty, was intense, no man perhaps in his senses will doubt. That his repentance was of that character, which is intended by great agonies of soul, and by the pangs and travails of the new birth; much less that it was accompanied with those frightful symptoms, to which we are seeking a scriptural parallel, hardly any one in his senses, with the plain narrative of the Scripture before his eyes, would venture to affirm. Nor does it redound to the credit of that man's soundness of understanding, or piety

[1] Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. iii. p. 135.

and humility of heart, who could deliberately compare a young female enthusiast struck down by the power of God's word [1], by which the relater meant to denote the efficacy of his own preaching, to Paul arrested in the career of his perscutions by a supernatural light, and falling to the earth under the piercing expostulations of the Almighty.

On the presumption of this comparison, consistent as it is with the general style of its employer, I forbear to enlarge. The comparison itself, however, naturally induces a reflection as to the characters of those persons, of whom the converts recorded in the evangelical history consisted, and of those, who have swelled the catalogue of the victims of modern delusion.

It was the observation of Origen, that, "if any one would candidly consider the Christians, they could produce him more who had been converted from a life not the worst, than from a very wicked course: for they," he adds, "whose consciences speak favourably in their behalf, are disposed to wish that our doctrine concerning the future rewards of goodness may be true; and so are more ready to assent to the Gospel than profligate men." And Jortin, who quotes the observation, judiciously remarks upon it; "I know it may be said, that among the first Christians there were several, who had led bad lives before: but there are many degrees of wickedness; and there is no reason to suppose that these sinners were for the most part of the worst sort; and though some persons, who have been very wicked, may become very good, and such were found amongst the first Christians, yet where the exceptions are few, the general observation is not affected by them; for thus much is certain, that an honest mind is a great help to understand the truth; that the practice of morality leads

[1] Whitefield. See Enthusiasm of Methodists, &c. vol. iii. p. 135.

to the practice of Christianity: and that, since conversion is brought about by steps, and revealed religion is founded on natural religion, he who is moved to embrace the Gospel, must be first sensible of the difference between good and evil, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice; must love the one and abhor the other; must repent of his former transgressions, and receive the sacred knowledge which is offered to him with gratitude, and a firm resolution of performing his duty. He therefore who can call evil good, and good evil, who is totally corrupted in heart and understanding, is removed to an infinite distance from God and righteousness, has no ears to hear, and no eyes to see, not even to see miracles, so as to be instructed and amended by them [1]."

Agreeably to this sound remark, which is well worthy the attention of those who are for depreciating moral goodness, and entertaining favourable hopes of the hardened sinner, St. Luke has incidentally mentioned certain traits in the characters of the primitive converts, which will materially assist the proposed comparison. We find them respectively described as "devout men," "worshipping God;" diligent in "searching the Scriptures;" willing to be guided in the search by the well-informed; listening to reason; and "receiving the word with all humility and readiness of mind." The Proconsul of Asia was a prudent man, as well as desirous of hearing the word of God. The Ethiopian eunuch, whose probity and wisdom are attested by the great authority delegated to him, and the unlimited confidence reposed in him by his sovereign, "had come to Jerusalem for to worship, and was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet;" an employment, undoubtedly indicating a religious and a reflecting mind. Cornelius was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all

[1] Jortin's Discourses and Remarks, vol. i. p. 7.

his house: which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." The life of Paul, whom it is the practice with certain religionists to represent as on a level with "drunkards, sabbath-breakers, whoremongers, adulterers, unclean wretches as ever trod on the ground [1];" and who has been somewhat coarsely and irreverently stigmatized as "that notorious persecutor Saul [2];" as "a flagrant rebel," and as "a devil incarnate [3];" had been "strict according to the straitest sect of his religion:" touching the righteousness which is in the law, he was blameless; "continually living in all good conscience before God," and even in the persecution of the Church of Christ acting under a false, but still a sincere, persuasion, that he was engaged in the execution of his duty, his heart was fervent and zealous, his mind capacious, vigorous, and well-stored.

Now in all these traits of character (and they apply in different degrees to most, if not all of the cases which have been passing before us) there is no tendency to irregular and enthusiastic feelings; no predominance of the imagination over the judgment; no deficiency in natural understanding: no want, or contempt, of intellectual improvement; no weakness in short to encourage a suspicion, that persons, endowed with such qualities, would be seduced by insufficient argumentation to embrace a new religion; or be impelled by a terrified conscience to a precipitate adoption of the faith in a moment of desperation, and to take refuge from the wages of sin in a groundless or imperfect conversion.

Had the characters of the primitive converts indeed been such as we are supposing, and as they are sometimes fondly represented; had they consisted of "savage jailors and felons in prison [4]," (whereas in

[1] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 177.
[2] Whitefield's Works, vol. v. p. 367.
[3] Evangelical Magazine, July 1806, p. 298, 299.
[4] Evangelical Magazine, July 1808, p. 201.

truth it does not appear from the sacred narrative, that there was any savageness in the disposition of the jailor at Philippi, or that any felons at all were converted,) there might have been occasion for that stricture upon the body at large, which Zosimus passed upon Constantine, that he chose Christianity as the only religion which promised impunity and pardon for his enormous practices[1]. What was really the case with respect to their characters, we have seen upon the testimony of Origen, corresponding with the representations of Scripture. The instruction, delivered by our Saviour to his Apostles, "into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy[2]," is well illustrated by the circumstances of the primitive converts; for it was not without reason that Pothinus, the immediate successor of Irenæus, when the Præfect demanded of him, Who was the Christian's God? replied, If thou be worthy, thou shalt know: intimating that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven were made known to those who were by previous habits of piety, proportioned to their opportunities, and by the ingenuousness and docility of their tempers, well disposed to receive it[3].

The persons, who have been most affected by the impulses of modern enthusiasm, and who constitute a large proportion of its converts, are probably of a different description, in point either of intellect, or of previous habit, or of both. They have been arranged in several divisions by an author, who made an ample inquiry, and possessed a clear insight into the nature of the case: I shall therefore adopt his classification in supposing them to consist in a great measure of "young persons, who are arrived neither to ripeness of reason, nor solid constitution of body; women, who (notwithstanding

[1] Barrow's Works, vol. ii. p. 63. [2] Matt. x. 11.
[3] See Barrow's Works, vol. iii. p. 337.

some exceptions) may without offence be called the weaker vessels; persons of a fickle and inconsistent humour; persons, though piously inclined, yet of weak judgment or weak nerves; persons disordered with hypochondriac fumes, and melancholy vapours, and divers other peculiar distempers; persons of lively parts and brisk fancy, though in a perfect state of health, yet deficient in a solid and settled judgment; persons of an amorous complexion; persons of bad principles, as hypocrites, those of a vain and ambitious mind, or of an impertinent and unwarrantable curiosity; and lastly, persons of profligate lives and libertine sentiments[1]." Such persons appear most adapted, both by constitution and by habits, for being wrought on by the modern methods, and for experiencing the modern symptoms, of conversion; and such persons the annals of enthusiasm enumerate amongst the most prominent of its converts.

If among this description of persons, and especially if among those in the last division, some have been effectually, sincerely, and permanently converted to pious sentiments and virtuous lives, God forbid I should endeavour to detract from the credit of those, to whose exertions it may be due. Enthusiasm, indeed, and schism, special delusion and religious factions, are laden with too monstrous an accumulation of evil, to suffer me to entertain a wish, that they should be robbed of whatever commendation they may incidentally merit. Yet I cannot withhold an opinion, that little is gained to the cause of pure Christianity, if men are rescued from sins of one character, only to fall into those of another; if conversion from sensual wickedness is followed by spiritual pride, calumny, detraction, presumption; by mutual jealousies, disputes, and divisions within their

[1] Bishop Lavington's Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compared, part iii. p. 190—204.

own societies, and an overweening scorn and intolerance towards those that are without.

It is however to be feared that methodistical conversion does not always terminate in consequences no more mischievous than these; but that, whilst it ingrafts the spiritual, it fails of lopping away the sensual sins. Impulses suddenly and violently impressed upon the feelings, where the reason is not engaged in their support, are naturally evanescent; and will probably yield to the reviving opposition of early, favourite, and inveterate habits.

It is painful, and it may appear uncharitable, to dwell upon such a topic as this; but the cause of pure religion is promoted by an exposure of the mischief and erroneous pretensions of superstition. It might be fruitless also to attempt exposing them, and to deny the efficacy of methodistical conversion, if I trusted the cause to less exceptionable evidence than that of the Founders of Methodism themselves. But surely no objection can be made to the acknowledgment of Whitefield[1], that there were among his followers "many mushroom converts, many persons that are always happy, happy, happy, and never were miserable; who hear the word with joy, and in a time of temptation fall away; that made him cautious now, which," says he, "I was not thirty years ago, of dubbing people converts so soon;" that "there were others, who, although they may have been converted twenty or thirty years ago, were perverted then, and stood in need of a further conversion to close Christianity with God;" and others, "who although they were really converted, were still conformed to the world, were still lukewarm, had ten thousand things that their own hearts must tell them they wanted to be converted from; who could go to a public-house, and play at cards, and the like, and yet bless God they were converted;

[1] Whitefield's Eighteen Sermons, p. 87, 134, 246.

who had been arrested by God's grace, even after conversion, when they were damning their own souls:"—nor can any reasonable exception be taken against the equally plain confession of Wesley, that there were among his disciples "sinners of every kind, and the great stumbling-block by them that say and do not. Such I take for granted," he says, "will be among us, although we purge them out as fast as we can: persons, that talk much of religion; that commend the preachers, perhaps are diligent in hearing them; it may be, read all their books and sing their hymns; and yet no change is wrought in their hearts. Were they of old time as lions in their houses? They are the same still. Were they (in low life) slothful, intemperate? Were they tricking or dishonest, over-reaching or oppressive? or did they borrow and not pay? *The Ethiopian hath not changed his skin.* Were they (in high life) delicate, tender, self-indulgent? Were they nice in furniture or apparel? Were they fond of trifles, or their own dear persons? *The leopard hath not changed her spots.* Others there are, in whom there was a real change. But it was only for a season. They are now turned back, and are twofold more the children of hell than before [1]."

Nor is the effect upon the mind more beneficial than that upon the heart. The understanding not having been enlightened previously to conversion, still continues under a cloud of darkness, which the opinion of enjoying exclusive spiritual privileges, and the contracted notions, to which that opinion gives birth, with respect to the merciful dispensations of Providence, are not calculated to remove. The Spirit converted their hearts; and the Spirit will guide their understandings into all truth. The means of instruction are as little prized as the means of grace. They are wiser than their uncon-

[1] Wesley's Farther Appeal, p. 130.

verted teachers; and as for human learning, they detest and abhor it as a diabolical invention, at enmity with the wisdom that is from above. Prejudice supplies an answer to every argument; and pride is an insurmountable barrier against conviction. In love with error, and closing their eyes against the truth, an insulated text of Scripture, torn perhaps from its context, imperfectly understood, and violently distorted into a correspondence with their confined prepossessions, is sufficient to intrench a favourite doctrine, and to serve as an impregnable bulwark against the whole accumulated force of the Gospel.

For the mind to be thus perverted is a case of ordinary occurrence; experience confirms the position by daily examples of its truth. Sometimes however the shock is more disastrous; and instead of partially obstructing, or contracting the current of the understanding, has forcibly wrested it from its channel. Irrational and unchristian, not to say unnatural, doubts and perplexities; a disbelief of God and of Christ; madness, sometimes expatiating in unbridled licentiousness, and sometimes convulsed with laughter amid severest woe; visions of despair, wherein the patient believes himself rejected by God, plunged into utter darkness, and actually tormented in hell; or visions of exultation, in which he fancies that he is plunged into the Deity, and identified with God[1]: such is the intellectual desolation, the darkness and the bondage, into which the converted have been betrayed; a darkness, which hath been felt by every faculty of the inward man, and a bondage wherein the iron hath entered deep into the soul.

But let us throw a veil over these gloomy images

[1] See Wesley's Journals, No. I. III. p. 133. No. III. p. 109. No. V. p. 81. Account of Samuel and Thomas Hitchens, p. 4. 12. 18, 19. Enthusiasm of Methodists, part ii. p. 112. part iii. p. 7, 8, 9. 45, 46. 88. 93. 4, 5, 6.

of the corruption, the perverseness, and the infatuation of human nature. Necessary as they are to be exhibited as fatal examples of the pernicious tendency of error, they are too melancholy to be contemplated with composure. The mind recoils from contemplating them; and seeks repose and consolation in that scene of harmony, and gladness; of gratitude, and devotion; of sober delight, and rational exultation; of "love, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," which is represented in the page of the Evangelist; when "they that gladly received the word were baptized, and continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer;" when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul;" and "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart; praising God, and having favour with all the people."

The foregoing comparison will, I trust, have made it appear that there are few points of resemblance between that instantaneous and violent conversion, which the Methodists consider as necessary to salvation; and that sort of conversion recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, to which the Methodists themselves refer, as affording authorities and parallels to their conceit.

In the first place then, we are furnished by this comparison with a strong negative argument against such conversions. For if they were not wrought in the early ages of the Gospel, it is surely reasonable to infer, and the inference I apprehend would be conceded by their advocates, that in the present age they are neither necessary nor profitable.

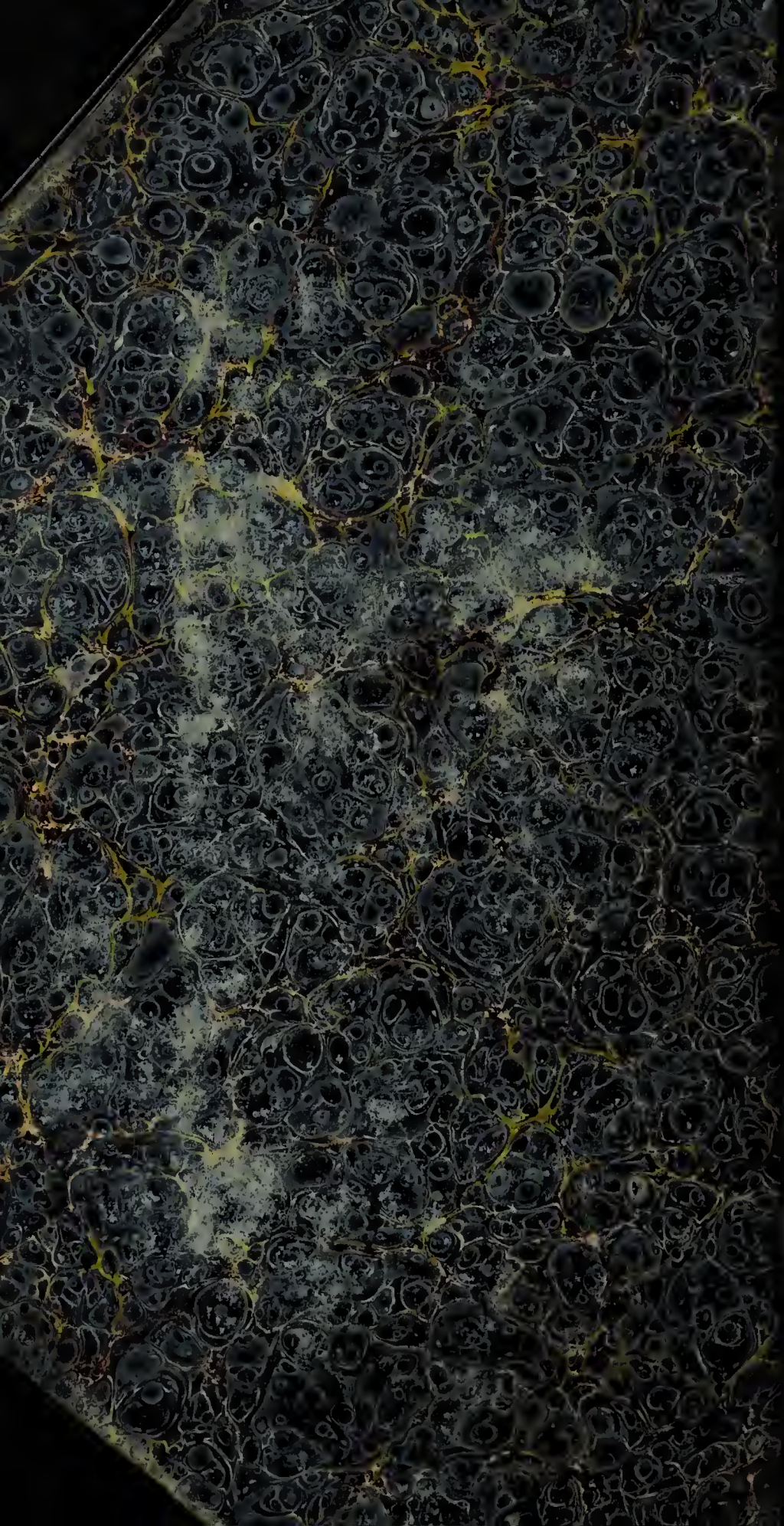
The argument, however, which the foregoing comparison supplies, is not merely negative; for, secondly, the reflections, to which it gives rise, authorize us positively to contend, that neither the

rapidity of such conversions; nor the means employed to effect them; nor the symptoms by which they are accompanied; nor the dispositions to which they are peculiarly adapted; nor the consequences by which they are followed; are agreeable to the general economy of Providence in his dealings with mankind.

We may therefore hold ourselves acquitted of any dereliction of evangelical truth, if we decline enforcing instantaneous conversion as necessary to the salvation of Christians. And if, on the contrary, we warn our hearers against being deluded by such fanciful, irrational, and unscriptural conceits; if we address them as beings, formed in the image, after the likeness of God, and although lamentably fallen indeed, and partakers of a nature essentially corrupt, yet still endowed with reason, the glorious inheritance derived from their gracious Creator; if we endeavour to convince their understandings, and thereby to alarm their fears, and animate their hopes; if we labour to persuade their minds of the necessity of a Redeemer to reconcile them to their offended God, and fill their hearts with a devout affection and veneration for Him, who paid the price of their redemption; if we impress on them the awful truth, that the wages of sin, notwithstanding the sacrifice of Christ, and notwithstanding their admission into his Church, will eventually be death, unless it be heartily repented of, through faith in the blood of the Redeemer, and followed by reformation and amendment of heart and life; if we persuade them not to rely on strong internal impulses, but to make diligent use of the appointed means of grace; and if we thus encourage and assist them, not to expect a sudden change of heart, but, under the guidance of the revealed will of God, and with the preventing and assisting grace of the Holy Spirit, gradually to build themselves up in faith and holiness, and so to grow unto an holy temple of the

Lord: we may then indulge the pleasing reflection of a good conscience, that we are preaching the doctrine of Peter, who called upon the Jews to "repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out;" that we are imitating the example of Paul, who was sent unto the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" and that we are fulfilling the intention of our blessed Saviour, when he required that sinners should "be converted, and become like little children, if they would enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Now unto "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to him be honour and power everlasting. Amen."

THE END.

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